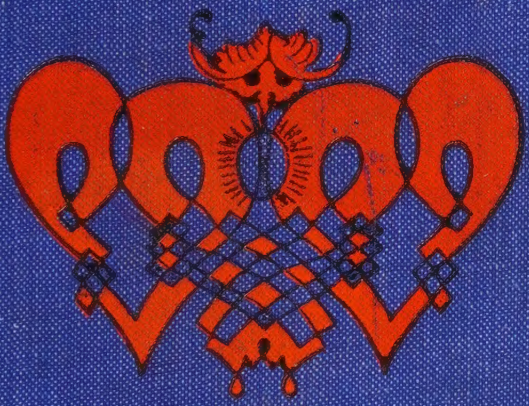
The Conflict



M. E. Braddon

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THE CONFLICT

WORKS OF M. E. BRADDON.

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET.
HENRY DUNBAR.
ELEANOR'S VICTORY.
AURORA FLOYD.
JOHN MARCHMONT'S LEGACY.
THE DOCTOR'S WIFE.
ONLY A CLOD.
SIR JASPER'S TENANT.
TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.
THE LADY'S MILE.
LADY LISLE.
CAPTAIN OF THE VULTURE.
BIRDS OF PREY.
CHARLOTTE'S INHERITANCE.
RUPERT GODWIN.
RUN TO EARTH.
DEAD SEA FRUIT.
RALPH THE BAILIFF.
FENTON'S QUEST.
LOVELS OF ARDEN.
ROBERT AINSLEIGH.
TO THE BITTER END.
MILLY DARRELL.
STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.
LUCIUS DAVOREN.
TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.
LOST FOR LOVE.
A STRANGE WORLD.
HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE.
DEAD MEN'S SHOES.
JOSHUA HAGGARD.
WEAVERS AND WEFT.
AN OPEN VERDICT.
VIXEN.
THE CLOVEN FOOT.
THE STORY OF BARBARA
JUST AS I AM.
ASPHODEL.
MOUNT ROYAL.
THE GOLDEN CALF.
PHANTOM FORTUNE.
FLOWER AND WEED.
ISHMAEL.
WYLLARD'S WEIRD.
UNDER THE RED FLAG.
ONE THING NEEDFUL.
MOHAWKS.
LIKE AND UNLIKE.
THE FATAL THREE.
THE DAY WILL COME.
ONE LIFE, ONE LOVE.
GERARD.
THE VENETIANS.
ALL ALONG THE RIVER.
THOU ART THE MAN.
THE CHRISTMAS HIRELINGS.
SONS OF FIRE.
LONDON PRIDE.
UNDER LOVE'S RULE.
ROUGH JUSTICE.
IN HIGH PLACES.
HIS DARLING SIN.
THE INFIDEL.

THE CONFLICT

BY

M. E. BRADDON

Author of "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "LONDON PRIDE," ETC.

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NOTE

THE Author has pleasure in recording her obligation to a very interesting personal narrative by Mr. Ironmonger Sola, and to an official report by Mr. William Ogilvie, for the local colour in her description of the overland route to the Klondyke River.

"La question agitée depuis que le monde existe, des visions extérieures, est subsidiaire, quand on y songe ; le Demon n'a pas besoin de s'exhiber sous des traits humains ou bestiaux afin d'attester sa présence ; il suffit, pour qu'il s'affirme, qu'il élise domicile en des âmes qu'il exulcère et incite à d'inexplicables crimes."

* * * * *

"I then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to perceive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to his mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,
Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven."

I.

Late autumn, the little season in London; carriages moving to and fro in the dusk of the worst-lighted city in Europe; dead leaves blown by the damp south-west wind, drifting across Piccadilly; a something of dreariness, a something of gaiety in the air.

On such an evening Walter Arden left his club, after an accustomed rubber, as the Abbey clock struck seven, and sauntered dreamily across St. James's Square to his lodgings in Jermyn Street. An idler, and always something of a dreamer, his reverie was deeper than usual to-night. He had been absent-minded at cards, and had played a losing game, to the disgust of his partner.

It had been one of his bad days. Since the first dawn of reason he had been subject to periods of depression, intervals in which his spirits sank to zero, and the disgust of life took hold of him. What right had he to live? what motive had he for life,—he who was of no use to any living creature, whom nobody loved or valued?

Motherless from his cradle; beginning life in a house of mourning, his advent into the world bringing death to the young mother; unloved by the father to whom he seemed the son of doom, the bringer of woe, the avenger of old half-forgotten sins; he had realized the hatefulness of existence at an age when other children are wrapped round with love, and sheltered from the knowledge of sorrow. He was that negligible quantity the youngest son of a peer, the only child of a second marriage; a marriage made somewhat late in life by Lord Wildernsea, who had fallen in love with a girl of obscure birth and humble fortune, but of a most exquisite beauty, and had made her his countess, to the infinite disgust of his first wife's children and their maternal relations.

She was a lovely creature, and adapted herself with consummate grace to her new surroundings, and she died in her second year of wedlock.

Nothing in life became her so well as this early death. Her step-children and their relatives forgave her; and she was ever after spoken of in the family as "Poor Emily."

Her portrait, by Millais, stood on an easel in Lord Wildernsea's book-room, the one room in his country house which he kept for himself. Her image was locked in his heart. He had lived like a modern hermit ever since her death, rarely consorting with his fellow-men except in the hunting-field, where he was notorious for silence and hauteur; a gaunt figure, splendidly mounted, aloof and uncivil. The old members of the hunt called him "the hard-riding spectre."

He hated his youngest son, and had never troubled himself to conceal his dislike. Ignored by half-brothers and half-sisters, who looked down upon him for the lack of blue-blood on the mother's side, the boy in his desolation had discovered a refuge from the world of stern realities in the world of sweet fancies—the world of books. Shakespeare, Spenser, Scott, were to him as fairy godmothers. Hans Anderson and the Brothers Grimm were his playfellows. He made for himself a paradise in the dull old library at Wildernsea, a room with many windows looking out upon the dreary level of a park; a room of such spaciousness that, sitting in his favourite corner by the north fireplace, it was a long walk from the south door for the nurse who came in quest of him.

The youngest of his half-brothers was at Eton before Walter had emerged from babyhood. The elders were grown men. Lord Melbrook, the heir, was a captain in a lancer regiment; Godfrey, the next brother, was a lieutenant in the Navy, when Walter was seven years old. There was a third son at Oxford, and a fourth at Sandhurst; and there were two married daughters; one who had chosen wisely, with the general approval, who had a house in Grosvenor Square, two country seats, and a villa at Cannes; one who had chosen ill, and was supremely happy in a Lincolnshire Vicarage.

Lord Wildernsea was found dead in his armchair in the

book-room, facing his wife's picture, one bleak February morning, while the unloved son was an undergraduate at Balliol, reading hard for a degree. He had nursed his estate in the long years of retirement, and he died a rich man.

To the unloved son he left more than to any of his other children, except the heir; and Walter Arden began life with an income which was more than sufficient for his wants. He was no spendthrift. He had been a student in his childhood, sitting on the hearth-rug in the long library at Wildernsea, with the quarto Spenser on his knees. He was a student still, and books were his sole extravagance; and as he only bought the books he wanted to read, this extravagance was not fatal. But though bookish, he was not a milksop. He had been stroke of his college boat in his last year at Oxford—he had done well at cricket at the Varsity, but had not pursued that noble sport afterwards; he was a good shot, and a fine fencer. Another young man in his independent position might have talked of a career, might have aired his opinions in politics, in the law, in literature, might have aspired to be something; but in Walter Arden the spring of ambition seemed wanting. He was content to live among his books, to travel alone in out-of-the-way tracks, to have very few friends, and no dreams of greatness. His eldest brother, who was always contemptuous, said of him that he had neither vices nor virtues; he was an odd volume of the Aldine poets in a frock-coat.

The past had been visibly present to him as he strolled through the autumn mists, across the damp dulness of the old-world square, to the narrow street that links it to a busier life. Pictures of that joyless past had leapt out of the brown evening, vivid as if seen yesterday.

Something, he knew not what, some feeling in the air perhaps, some cloud in the London sky, had stirred those memories, which ached like old wounds.

He shrugged his shoulders, as if to shake off a burden, as he stopped before the street door. He let himself in with his latch-key, meaning to go straight to his rooms on the first floor; but to his infinite surprise his landlady, the most

unobtrusive of women, whose face he had seldom seen twice in a quarter, darted out of her den at the back of the house, and met him at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, sir, will you be so good as to step into my sitting-room? There is something I want to say to you."

He saw her face looking up at him in the lamplight, and he saw that she had been crying. There were red marks round her pale, grey eyes, though the eyes were dry. She was very plain, with insignificant features, sandy hair, sandy eyebrows, and white eyelashes, and a pale fairness of complexion which might have been a charm in a beautiful woman. Care, anxious care, was the ruling characteristic of her face, and had given a strained look to every feature. She was a pattern of industry, an admirable manager, and a gifted cook, and her lodgers rose up and called her blessed.

"Certainly, Mrs. Berry," Arden answered kindly. "But what's the matter? I hope you're not in trouble of any kind."

"Indeed I am, sir, in very great trouble; or I shouldn't have ventured to ask your help."

He followed her into a den of a room behind the staircase, and over the scullery, a room where the slow trickle of water from a cistern made a melancholy music. A room where the only prospect by day was the side-wall of an adjoining house, and where the stuffiness by night suggested the black hole at Calcutta, just such a miserable morsel of space pinched off the better part of the house as lodging-house keepers in London must needs be content to live in —an ill-shapen, gloomy abomination of a room, in which, however, there had been some attempt to achieve prettiness. There were paper fans upon the wall, Japanese teacups on the mantelpiece, and a plaster bust of Byron on that odious piece of furniture called a chiffonier. Even the armchair, covered with American cloth, had something of its hideousness hidden by frills and festoons of muslin.

"Please take a seat, sir; it's a long story I've got to tell you."

"I shall be very glad to help you if I can. If it is a money trouble——"

"No, no, sir; it isn't that. It's my daughter, sir; it's my

dear, dear daughter. It's the thought of danger and sorrow to her that's weighing me down."

"Why, what danger can come near her in this house, living under your care? I saw her yesterday morning. She was pale, but I thought I had never seen her looking so pretty."

"Ah, sir, I wish she wasn't so pretty. I wish it had pleased Providence for her to take after her father or me."

"Beauty is a choice gift, Mrs. Berry."

"It may be for those that can live up to it, Mr. Arden; but do you think a pretty girl can be in her right place in this parlour?"

"It is a dull life for a girl, no doubt; but she must be happy with her kind mother."

"Oh, sir, what can my kindness do for her? I'm always busy about the house from morning to night; for though I keep two servants, I'm never able to sit down. Servant girls want looking after at every turn. And then there's the cooking, which I daren't trust to any one. What company am I for a girl of eighteen? She sits alone in this room all day long, trying to pass the time—sometimes it's fancy-work, or trimming a hat; or sometimes I find her deep in study—French exercises—or an instructive book. Sometimes I find her crying over Lord Byron's poetry, or a novel; and I don't like to see Lisbeth cry even over fictitious troubles, for she takes such things to heart more than other girls."

"She has the look of a sensitive person."

"Sensitive isn't the word, sir. She's made up of nerves and fancies. The dreams that girl has! Often and often she wakes with a scream, and tells me what she's been dreaming, things that make my blood run cold."

"I fear you keep her too close in this house. She wants fresh air, exercise, change of scene."

"That's just what the doctor said, sir, when she was so low last summer—as white as a ghost—and no appetite—and scarcely any sleep. 'Give her fresh air and change, and cheerful young society,' says Dr. Durrant; and since then I've been obliged to give her more freedom, you see, sir; and she goes for a long walk with a friend every day—in the parks—sometimes right across London, as far as Primrose Hill."

"Nothing could be better for her, if the friend is a person you like, and whom you can rely upon for good conduct and good principles."

"Oh, Mr. Arden, who can rely upon anybody? After all the young servants I've had in the last twenty years, I know there's no such thing as reliance where girls are concerned. Miss Milsome is the daughter of the Italian warehouseman round the corner, most respectable people, and much better off than me and my girl. She's a very pleasant-spoken young lady, and has had the best of educations at the High School."

"A schoolfellow of your daughter's, I suppose?"

"Ah, no, sir; our girl never went to school. Her father would not hear of school for her. He would hardly let her out of his sight. She was brought up in this room, like a hothouse flower."

It seemed an unlikely place for a flower to bloom in, hardly an atmosphere for the rankest weed.

"We engaged a young person to come in every day, from breakfast to dinner, to carry on her education. Perhaps we've been wrong, sir, in keeping her so close; but we wanted to bring her up without any contact with London wickedness. She's as innocent as a little child, and, except for what she may have read without our knowledge in the poets—being not much of bookworms ourselves—she doesn't know the meaning of sin."

Mrs. Berry's manner in speaking of the poets implied that she looked upon them as dangerous characters.

"We had an elderly German lady twice a week, to teach her the piano. My poor James grudged no expense for her. He worshipped the very ground she walked upon."

"Well, but, my dear Mrs. Berry, what is your trouble about your daughter?"

"It's the worst kind of trouble, sir, for a mother. I know my girl isn't happy, and I'm afraid—oh, sir, I'm afraid she's deceiving me—and I'm afraid there's a man in the background."

"What man? Is it any one you know?"

"No, sir. I only wish it was, for then I should be able to deal with him. There's a man in the background; a man

who came to this door with Lisbeth yesterday evening, in the dusk, after six o'clock. Matilda Jane saw him from the attic window; a very tall fine-looking man, she said.; and she saw him bending down to talk to Lisbeth, and Lisbeth let him hold her hand; and the two stood there, hand in hand, for a bit, before she rang the bell. He had gone clean out of sight when Matilda Jane opened the door, for she looked up and down the street, on a pretence of wanting to see if it was raining."

"And your daughter told you nothing about this stranger?"

"Not she, sir. I asked her where she had been, and why she came home so late; and she said she and Emma Milsome had been for a long walk Brompton way, and had their tea at an A.B.C. shop in the Brompton Road. God knows how much of that is true, or how much false. I can't lower my daughter by questioning her friend."

"You should question your daughter, severely, if necessary."

"Oh, Mr. Arden, I couldn't be severe with her, if I tried ever so. She has a look that melts me. Her sweet blue eyes fill with tears at a cross word. She is too sensitive for this world. I can't bear to talk unkindly to her; and I can't bear to deprive her of anything she has set her heart upon; and that's where I feel I've been wrong in letting her go to the theatre to-night."

"You are letting her go to the theatre without you?"

"You see it's this way, Mr. Arden. Emma Milsome came round at four o'clock and said she had had an order sent her for the Criterion, from a friend—an order for two for the upper circle, and might Lisbeth go with her? Their old book-keeper, who lives in the house, would see the two girls safe inside the theatre, and would meet them at the door when the play was over, and bring them safe home. It's hardly a step from here, as you know, sir; and Emma was very earnest about it; and Lisbeth she just looked at me with her eyes shining like stars; and I couldn't bring myself to say no."

"And now you are sorry you said yes?"

"I can't help feeling uneasy, sir, remembering how strange and upset Lisbeth has been lately; and remembering what

Matilda Jane told me about the stranger talking to her at my own door. Do you think I did wrong, sir?"

"I don't think you were wise. How did Miss Milsome come by the order?"

"A friend gave it her."

"What kind of a friend?"

"I believe it was some one in the orchestra. The Milsomes keep a good deal of company."

"I think your first duty should have been to question your daughter about the stranger. That is a serious matter, you see."

"Yes, sir; I feel that it is very serious. It's preying upon my mind every hour of the day."

"And in the face of that difficulty I don't think you should have let her out of your sight for a whole evening."

"That's what I feel, sir—and, oh, if you would only help me in my trouble, I should be more grateful than words can say."

"There's only one way that I could help you; and that is to go to the theatre and see if your daughter and her friend are there, and not in dangerous company."

"It seems asking you too much, sir; but if you would do that——"

"I will do as much, with pleasure, if it will be any relief to your mind."

"It will, sir; the greatest possible relief."

II.

From Walter Arden, in London, to Douglas Campbell, in Tasmania.

My dear Douglas,

I have not forgotten how in the old days at Balliol we made a compact in which I pledged myself that if ever in the course of my life, soon or late, I came upon any experience which tended to shake me from my sceptical attitude as to those supernatural influences which you have always believed in, I would send you a careful record of that experience. It might be something vague and elusive, no visible presence of the unforgotten dead, no sound of voice, or touch of hand. It might be no more than a strange dream. It might be a state of mind, rather than an occurrence; but any mental phase, any mood or feeling, for which I was unable to account upon commonsense grounds, which seemed to pass beyond the limits of human reason, would be not unworthy your consideration; and it was in our compact that I should send you my deliberate and honest description of my feelings, across the width of the world which divides us.

I have often thought of our compact, entered upon so gravely on your part, so lightly and half-scornfully on mine, and of those long arguments we have held in many a winter walk on the Woodstock Road.

Your Highland blood made for belief in that other world which to your fancy was all about us—bound by no law of place or time—in the midst of this mechanical universe governed by laws so rigid and unalterable. I, the man who worshipped science, and bowed to its adamantine rule, could but smile at your belief in things that science makes mock of—in the invisible presence of the dead, as

thinking, loving, suffering beings, hovering round the living; in forewarnings; in thought-transference; in the subtle influence of one mind over another; in the abrogation of all the laws of nature, under the dominant force of the gifted soul—human, but immortal, with infinite power, untried and unsuspected for the most part, but existing.

I doubt if the Psychical Society, of which you are so enthusiastic a member, would consider what I am going to tell you worthy of their consideration; but I know it will interest you to receive a detailed account of a mental mystery, in place of my customary budget of club gossip, and opinions upon new books and new plays.

I spent last Wednesday evening at the Criterion theatre, not for my own pleasure, but as a friendly service to Mrs. Berry, my excellent landlady, who had allowed her daughter to go to the theatre with a young friend, and who was uneasy about the girl's safety, a stranger having been seen talking with her at the street door on her home-coming the previous afternoon.

Before I relate the evening's experience, I must give you some idea of the girl, Lisbeth, who is by no means represented by the words my landlady's daughter, which may conjure up a commonplace type of cockney prettiness.

Lisbeth is not the common type of girl. I doubt if she can be called pretty. Certainly no one would call her handsome. Her only noticeable charms are a complexion of a milky whiteness, like the petal of a Mary lily, on which rose-flushes come and go with every wave of emotion, pale red-gold hair, and large blue eyes, full of thought, strangely thoughtful for a girl of eighteen, whose experience of life is so small; for this lodging-house keeper's only child has been kept from all contact with the outer world.

Does this account conjure up an interesting image? It is difficult to describe a face whose greatest attraction is its unlikeness to all other faces. Singularity to some minds is more attractive than actual beauty; and I own that Lisbeth Berry has interested me and attracted me, not as an admirer, but as a student of strange personalities. Though I have always set my face against the supernatural, I have always been a lover of the strange. Meeting Lisbeth now and then as she moved about the house, I have said to myself,

were I as credulous an enthusiast as Campbell, I should say, "Here is a girl who is more in touch with the spirit-world than with Jermyn Street, Piccadilly."

It shocked me to find that this gentle, retiring creature had been seen conversing familiarly with a man unknown to the poor mother, and, considering that her ignorance of life increased instead of lessened the danger of her unprotected position, I felt scarcely less anxious than her mother about her visit to the theatre with only a girl-companion.

It was an intermediate season, with a strange company. The stars were all away on tour in the great provincial towns. The Palais Royal comedy, tortured into an English farce, had failed to attract the public; so I was able to get a stall near the orchestra, from which I had a good view of the upper circle; and there in the front row, I discovered Lisbeth and her friend, a respectable tradesman's daughter. Both girls had removed their hats, and Lisbeth's light red hair looked like an aureola in an early Italian picture—indeed the girl's hair and complexion had always reminded me of one of Fra Angelico's Madonnas in the Academia at Florence, save that Lisbeth's colouring was more subdued, and her countenance more spiritual, than the painter's favourite type.

The upper circle was thinly occupied, and at the side where the girls were sitting the back rows were vacant, when I entered the theatre; and when I took my survey of the house after the first act there was no one near them. They were not talking to each other. Lisbeth's friend was looking about the house with an opera glass, now at the stalls, now at the boxes; but Lisbeth's eyes were gazing intently at a fixed point, and, following that steadfast gaze, I was surprised to see my sister, Mary Selby, sitting in the stage box.

You know how little Mary and I see of each other. She asks me to some of her parties, and she is always civil and pleasant when we meet. I abhor parties. I go to her house two or three times a year, to show that I "bear her a good heart," as the gipsy fortune-tellers say; and I am at this moment under engagement to dine with her next Friday week—a three-weeks' engagement. What gusto can

there be in dinners solemnly planned for the dim future? In the season her dinner invitations are five or six weeks ahead. I sigh for the old familiar easy-going days of Theodore Hook, Lady Blessington, and the brothers Smith, when men—and even women—dined with each other at a day's notice.

Mary was looking bored, and she was looking preoccupied, a deeper thoughtfulness than often visits that splendid face. You know how handsome she is, and with a clear-cut, richly coloured beauty that defies time. How handsome, and how commonplace! I had never seen so much mind in her countenance as I saw last Wednesday night. I had never seen the impress of sorrow there as I saw it then.

She paid very little attention to the play. A farcical comedy which kept the pit and gallery in a roar left her face grave. She turned from time to time to speak to a man who stood in the shadow behind her chair. I could see no more of him than that he was a very tall man, and of bulk in proportion to his height. When the lights went up after the second act, he came to the front of the box, and looked about the house, notably at that spot in the upper circle where Lisbeth and her friend were sitting. Turning my glass quickly from the box to that opposite point, I saw that Lisbeth was conscious of his gaze. Her eyes met his, and there was a joyous light in them that told me this was the man to be feared. Here was the danger that threatened.

This man, this danger to innocent girlhood, is a man of striking and even distinguished appearance, and with something of that strangeness which to some minds, as I have said, is more attractive than symmetry of form. He is of mature age, perhaps between forty and forty-five, his hair iron-grey, moustache and eyebrows black, complexion very dark, but with a deep glow of colour flushing the cheek and giving light to the steely grey eyes—such eyes as I have seldom seen except in the hawk tribe—so brilliant, rapid, restless, all-seeing. Vitality is the chief characteristic of the man's face. I never saw a human countenance so intensely alive. The fire of life burns there, as it only burns in the face of a conqueror. For the rest there is no claim

to beauty. The features are regular, but roughly moulded. The mouth is sensual, the chin resolute, and the teeth have something canine in their whiteness.

"Who and what is he?" I asked myself. "Surely with such a glow of life in him the man must have made his mark in the world."

He is at least six feet four, and stands like a tower, broad-chested, his head nobly set upon powerful shoulders.

While I was looking at him he slipped quietly from the box. I saw my sister turn as the door closed upon him, and I read annoyance in her manner as she sank back in her chair and put up her eye-glass to make a listless survey of the audience, so listless that she failed to discover her brother in the stalls.

I knew where to look, and, within two or three minutes of his leaving the box, I discovered the unknown, sitting behind the two girls in the upper circle, leaning forward to talk to Lisbeth. I could see the happy look on the girl's face, even though her eyes were hidden under the downcast lids; that look of ineffable joy which only first love can bring to the utterly innocent, to the girl whose feet have but just touched the brink of that mystic river which divides childhood's happy ignorance from womanhood's fatal knowledge: the river of tears.

He spoke to the other girl now and then; but the greater part of his conversation was with Lisbeth, and the lowered head told of the lowered voice, breathed close to the listening ear, and of her low replies—faltered by lips that trembled as they spoke. He only left her when the curtain had been up some time; and in the obscurity of the sunk lights I saw his hand seek hers and hold it for a long minute, while he whispered an adieu.

Or was it an adieu? An appointment to meet her after the play, perhaps; but I was there to baulk his intentions in that line.

He reappeared in the box, and this time he seemed by a particular attentiveness to excuse himself to my sister for having left her during the *entre-acte*. She rose to go, before the end of the piece, and he assisted her while she muffled herself in a satin and sable coat that would have been warm enough for mid-winter in Petersburg.

I left the stalls five minutes after they left the box, and was in time to see the unknown take leave of Mary as he shut her brougham door, the tall footman dwarfed by his magnificence.

I watched him from the hall as he lighted a cigar, and strolled slowly eastward.

"No, my friend, you are not going home," I told myself; "you have shaken off your companion, and you are waiting for your prey. You don't live east of Piccadilly, and you have business in hand which will bring you back to this spot."

I waited till the audience poured into the hall. Among the first to appear were Lisbeth and her friend, and the entranced look in the girl's eyes told me she came to meet a lover. What was it to her that the man was old enough to be her father, that his hair was iron-grey, and his brow marked with the sign-manual of a tempestuous life, his mouth at once hard and sensual? She was under the spell which such men have power to cast over sensitive women.

She came into the hall with her eyes shining, and a smile upon her lips. As she ascended the last stair, I saw the unknown reappear at the door, and she walked quickly towards him, threading her way through the crowd, her friend following. I can never forget the change in her countenance when I intercepted her, halfway to the door. The vivid flush on her cheek changed to a sickly whiteness. Her eyes darkened with a look that was almost despair.

"Your mother asked me to see you and Miss Milsome safely through the crowd," I said gravely.

She looked at me with those despairing eyes, but was too humbled to speak. I gave her my right arm, and kept Miss Milsome on my left as we went out of the theatre. The unknown retreated to the pavement outside, watching us with a malignant frown which might have dispelled any reasonable being's infatuation. But this poor Lisbeth is not a reasonable being. She belongs to the class of creatures in which you are interested, the creatures in whom imagination takes the place of reason, the sensitives. Her hand trembled as it touched my arm, lightly, and reluctantly; and I knew that she hated me for my interference.

I knew also, when we had crossed the road and were walking down Jermyn Street, that the stranger was following slowly on the opposite pavement.

"We will see Miss Milsome safely home first," I said.

"Mother needn't have troubled you about us, sir," Lisbeth said, in a voice which trembled almost as her hand trembled. "Emily and I would have been quite safe in coming these few steps."

"London is hardly a safe place for young ladies without an escort," I answered. "It was no trouble for me to meet you, and I am very glad to be useful."

"Indeed, you are very kind, sir," the other girl said; and I thought by her tone that my interference was a relief rather than an annoyance to her.

We went with her to her door, and waited till it was opened by a sleepy parlourmaid. There was no word said about the old book-keeper who was to have been at the theatre to see them home. That was evidently a soothing fiction meant to tranquillize Mrs. Berry.

Miss Milsome kissed her friend, who was as irresponsive as a stone, wished me a polite good night, and the door closed upon her, leaving Lisbeth and me standing in the narrow side-street, both of us conscious of a tall figure lurking in the shadow of the houses opposite.

The air was very mild for late October, and the sky was alive with stars.

"Will you walk a little way with me, Lisbeth?" I asked. "There is something I want to say to you before I take you home."

"I don't care where I go," she answered listlessly. "But I can't imagine anything you can have to say to me, sir, unless it's about some trouble of mother's."

"It is about a trouble of your mother's, Lisbeth."

She asked no farther question, but walked by my side in a dead silence.

There were not many people about at this hour; but I felt I could not talk to her till we were in some quieter place than the streets; and it was not till we had passed through the Marlborough Gate and were in the gloom of the deserted Mall, that I broke the silence in which we had walked side by side. I had seen the dumb devil of obstinacy in her

face as she passed under the lamps, and I knew that I had a difficult task before me. There was no good in beating about the bush. I had to convince her of her danger, even by the roughest means.

"Who is the man who was sitting with you and your friend at the theatre, and how did you become acquainted with him?" I asked.

"I don't see that you have any right to question me, sir."

"I have the right given me by your mother in her sorrow, Lisbeth. You are breaking her heart; and you are going the way to break your own. Who is that man?"

"He is a gentleman."

"Perhaps. Girls of your age are not the best judges of that question. Who is he?"

"I don't know."

"You know his name, I suppose?"

"No."

"Not even his name?"

"I know him."

"How did you become acquainted?"

"He saved my life."

"That sounds romantic."

"Oh, it was not romantic; it was only horrible. It was in Piccadilly—the crossing at the top of St. James's Street. Emily and I were crossing, and I lost my nerve. There was a great waggon coming down upon us. The horses were close upon me. I felt their hot breath. I shut my eyes, and my heart stopped beating. I heard people shouting; then nothing; only the sense of a hand that snatched me away from those dreadful horses. Strong arms lifted me up like a feather, and carried me to the pavement. I was almost fainting, when a strange voice spoke to me and told me to be strong; and in a moment the cloud passed, and my heart beat freely. It was his voice, deep and strong, like the sound of the sea."

"Well, having done you this service, did he not give you his card, so that you could tell your mother who had helped you?"

"He walked with us to the park, where we were going. It was a lovely afternoon, more than a month ago, and he sat with us in a quiet part in the park, and we talked—we talked

of all the things I love best—poetry, pictures, music—and we became friends."

"Friends! And you don't know his name!"

"What can a name matter, if I know him, if I believe in him, and feel his power over me and over all things, and trust him almost as I trust in God?"

"And have you seen him often since that day?"

"Not often; but I have seen him."

"A dozen times?"

"I have seen him five times. To-night was the fifth time."

"And to-night he asked you and your friend to take a little walk with him after the play?"

"Yes. We should have been walking with him now, here in this park, in the starlight, if you had not come between us."

I cannot describe the disappointment, the bitterness in her tone.

"And when you don't see him you are unhappy, the hours seem long and dreary?"

"They seem endless."

"Lisbeth, you are on the pathway of lost souls, the path that leads to misery and death."

And then I argued with this poor romantic child, so helpless in her ignorance of life and its meanings, a creature of nerves and fancies, and poetic dreams, who, coming suddenly in contact with a man of powerful personality, a strong mind in a strong body, a man of exceptional vitality, was almost as helpless under that strange spell as those miserable victims of nerves and superstition in the dark ages, when Satan assumed a palpable shape, and the lives of cloistered nuns were devil-haunted.

Never in my life had I pleaded with such earnestness—never pleaded more vainly. The girl was under the spell of newly awakened passion.

"Will you promise never to see this man again, if you can help it, never to listen to him, or encourage his pursuit, if he waylays you?"

"No, I won't promise. I love him, and I trust him."

"You trust him? You trust a man who follows you as light women are followed by bad men? His conduct

to-night was an insult—the worst insult a man can offer a woman. He takes advantage of your humble station, the fact that you have neither father nor brother to punish him if he wrongs you."

"I love him. I can't help it. I can't help it. I would be content to be his servant, to live in his house and toil for him; only to see his face, only to hear his voice, once a day. When he talks to me I feel like the dirt under his feet. I wish we lived in a country where there were slaves, that I might be his slave. I wish I could come between him and some great danger, and die for him."

I write these words as she spoke them, in order that you may understand this unhappy girl's infatuation, and the peril in which she stands.

I said all I could to soothe her nerves, to awaken the light of reason; and she seemed in a better frame of mind when we walked back to her mother's house; but when I had opened the door, and Mrs. Berry's anxious face appeared in the lamplit hall, I could see that the girl was sullen rather than resigned. She hardly answered my friendly good night; and she followed her mother into the little parlour in silence.

I have written at great length, because I am keenly interested in this wretched girl's story, and mean to make every possible effort to save her; but all that I have written so far is only a prelude to the strangest, the most vivid, and the most horrible dream that ever I remember to have dreamt.

From the trackless confusion of my ordinary dreams I came suddenly into a world where all things were distinct, and all events followed in regular sequence.

I was in a hyperborean desert, whose biting cold I felt in every bone of my body, an iron plain under an iron sky, a vast monotonous steppe stretching far away to a sunless horizon, broken here and there by basaltic rocks scattered over the dismal waste in some volcanic upheaval, and with here and there an ice-bound pool which flashed like polished steel in the dim grey light.

In my dream I thought that neither sun, nor stars, nor moon, had ever looked upon that frozen land.

But in the distance, lurid against the greyness of earth

and sky, there rose a column of fire, vermilion and orange flame, towering up to the iron roof of this dreadful world, and spreading a horrible glare over the arid plain. This fiery shaft rose from a great gap in the earth; and in my dream I knew it was the mouth of hell. I saw strange figures ascend and stream over the plain—figures of half-naked men, of gigantic size, but nobly fashioned—men whose faces shone with a diabolical beauty; the faces of falcons and eagles, full of evil power. No cloven hoofs, no horned brows revealed their horrid species; but in my dream I knew that they were devils.

Suddenly, from behind a low ridge of rocks, there came a train of wild women. Many of them young, some beautiful, others old and haggard. They rushed across the plain, and met and mingled with the company of devils; and then began a diabolical dance of fiends and wild women, compared with which the revels of the witches on the Brocken were mild and civilized. I saw beauty and strength, streaming tresses, fiery eyes, the rugged force of giants, the serpentine grace of beautiful women, mingling in that savage rapture; and in my dream I knew that I was gazing upon a scene in the early dawn of history, and that these women were Scythian witches, banished from the cities and villages of the land, repudiated even by the barbarous hordes of the wild north; homeless, lawless, mates and companions for a company of devils.

The dance seemed to last for hours. I saw white-haired hags trampled underfoot, grovelling in the dust, spurned by the flying feet of youth and power; and gradually, amidst the tumultuous throng, ever moving in wild gyrations, my attention became concentrated upon two figures which I had seen in the distance, towering above the rest, grander and more diabolical than any other shapes in that infernal throng.

They came nearer to me; and in the face of the fiend I saw the features and expression of the man whose countenance I had watched and studied in the theatre. It was the same face, but grander in its unearthly power, a face lighted by the fires of hell, more beautiful, more terrible, than humanity. Beside him, hanging upon his shoulder in the diabolical dance, was the loveliest of all

those witch-women; and these two having once appeared in the foreground of that Pandemonium, stood out in bold relief, distinctly outlined against the mass of fiendish faces and whirling forms, and dominated the scene. I seemed to watch them for an intolerable length of time, with sickened heart and weary eyes, weighed down by the sense of a world abandoned to the powers of darkness.

The hideous revelation of this infernal populace froze my soul. I think you know that I went to Oxford a doubter, and that I left the Varsity an unbeliever. Most of all had I scoffed at the notion of a hell, of a personal devil, and his army of fiends. And here, face to face with this demon-world, there came upon me the appalling conviction that the dominion of Satan was a power that had existed before the beginning of time, and would rule and reign throughout eternity.

Suddenly a cloud of snow drifted across the lurid picture, and blotted it out.

My dream changed, and I was standing in a watch-tower on the walls of Rome, looking down upon the sack of the city. I heard the tremendous sound of the Gothic trumpets under the midnight sky, as the Salarian Gate was silently opened by a traitor's hands, and Alaric's barbarous hordes poured into the streets, with licence to sack and plunder, to ravage and kill, furious victors after a triple siege.

Like the pictured scenes in a moving panorama the horrors of that nocturnal massacre passed before my eyes; rapine, murder, the pitiless slaughter of the old and feeble; the white hairs of age, the sunny locks of childhood, dragged over the blood-bespattered stones, cruelties unspeakable; a spectacle that I cannot remember without pain, unreal though it was. And through all that labyrinth of horror one figure was predominant, the captain of a barbaric legion, in whose colossal form and satanic countenance I saw the likeness of the man I had watched in the theatre.

Other scenes followed, familiar in the history of the world, along the sequence of the centuries, scenes of terror and crime, and in all *his* face flashed out upon me through fire and blood, in the heart of the carnage, the embodied power of evil.

The Conflict.

The last vision showed me a room in a Russian palace, the death-chamber of the murdered Emperor Paul; and in the band of conspirators *his* tall figure, superb in a general's uniform, rose pre-eminent, the murderer-in-chief.

I woke exhausted, escaping with a struggle from dreams that seemed to have held me in their ghastly spell for a long night of agony—and I heard the clock of St. James's Church strike two. I had been in bed something less than an hour, and for the greater part of that time I had been lying awake, with every prospect of a sleepless night.

I send you my dream, because you are a connoisseur and a collector of the uncanny, not because I myself attach any importance to it. I trace the vision of the desert steppe and the satanic populace to a certain passage in Gibbon, which impressed my imagination some time ago, when I took down one of his volumes and opened it at random for an hour's fireside reading. Perhaps there are few who read their Gibbon nowadays; but the book has always been a favourite of mine. I love the history of those dim centuries when Christianity and Paganism existed side by side. I love the splendour of the Eastern Empire; the grandeur of Rome, noble even in decay.

So, remembering that legend of the Scythian witches, who, banished from human companionship for their hellish practices, met and mated with the infernal powers, and became the mothers of a diabolical race, my dream is easily accounted for.

III.

Arden had a long conversation with Mrs. Berry on the morning after his bad dream. He withheld nothing that had come to his knowledge from the mother's ear. She had a right to know everything that concerned her daughter's peril, every circumstance, however insignificant, that would help to put her on her guard against the enemy.

"Oh, sir, what am I to do?" she asked despairingly, being one of those weak women who, having lived under a husband's control for the best part of their life, are incapable of coming to a decision in a crisis. "Oh, Mr. Arden, do help me! Save her, sir! Save my poor girl—my only child—all I have in this world to work for and to love!"

It was a difficult case. The girl could not be put under lock and key; nor could the mother watch over her with unceasing vigilance. For the mistress of a West End lodging-house there were but scanty hours of leisure; nor was the uneducated mother a companion for the half-educated daughter. In that dingy ground-floor parlour, with no outlook but a London yard, no sounds but the drip of the cistern and the dull roar of distant wheels, the monotony of street-organs, and the maddening iteration of church-bells, youth, with its romantic longings, its vague visions of a world of beauty, somewhere, far out of reach, was eating its heart out. Arden felt an unspeakable pity for mother and daughter. It seemed to him that these middle-class parents, the strugglers and breadwinners, had made a fatal mistake in bringing up their beloved girl-child in the prison-house of a back parlour. They had reared her in ignorance of the world and its ways, in ignorance of evil; but in so doing they had stunted the growth of her mind, dwarfed the power of observation and comparison, and made her an easy victim for the seducer.

Better for her, he thought, to have suffered the rough training of a middle-class day-school, to have rubbed shoulders with the good and bad, to have been early acquainted with the manifold perils of life, the snares set for beauty, the battle of the sexes, the treachery, the cruelty, the falsehood of the strong in their dealings with the weak. On the threshold of her nineteenth birthday this girl was an infant in her ignorance of life, and the first voice that thrilled her ear, the first hand that held hers with a lover's grasp, the first lips that sought the kiss her modesty refused, while the impulse of her heart would have yielded it, were the voice and the hand and the lips of the predestined conqueror. Nothing but total separation from the pursuer could save her from perdition. Her imagination was enslaved, her will was subjugated, and she had already travelled halfway on the road to ruin.

"There is only one thing I can advise," he told Mrs. Berry. "Send your daughter away from London, in such careful custody that this man will not be able to get an interview with her, even if he finds out where she is living. Have you any relations or friends in the country whom you could trust to take care of her?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a troubled look; "there is Lisbeth's Aunt Tabitha, my dear husband's only sister, a single woman, and very comfortably off, who has a nice cottage near Woking."

"The very person, I should think."

"Oh, I don't know, sir. I'm afraid my poor girl wouldn't be happy with her."

"She wouldn't be happy anywhere while she is in her present frame of mind."

"No, sir; I'm afraid not. But the country is so dull, when one has been used to the gaiety of town."

Arden thought of the smoky, stuffy back parlour with a shudder.

"And Aunt Tabitha is a hard woman. She was still-room maid, and then housekeeper, in a nobleman's family for nearly thirty years, and saved a little fortune, quite enough for her to live independent for the rest of her days. She keeps a servant, and has everything nice about her. Indeed, her cottage is a perfect picture; but then there is hardly a

chimney within half a mile. She hasn't the smuts to contend with, as we have in St. James's."

"You don't think she would be unkind to your daughter?"

"No, sir; I do not. She is very fond of Lisbeth. Lisbeth is her goddaughter; but we could not bring ourselves to call her Tabitha. She'd be very kind to my girl in her way—but it's not like my way."

"And you know of no one else to whom you could trust your daughter?"

"No, sir; there is no one else. And you really think I ought to send my girl away?"

"Most certainly—if you can place her with some one who will keep a close watch upon her. Remember, there is no doubt as to her danger; danger from this man; danger from her own state of mind. She will be safer anywhere than in this house; but wherever she is, she must be watched and guarded; guarded from her own romantic impulses, and from this man's unscrupulous pursuit."

"You don't know who he is, sir, or anything about him?"

"I know nothing about him now, except that he is a dangerous man. But I hope soon to find out a good deal more."

"I hope you will, sir. It will be some help."

"The help must come from you, Mrs. Berry, and from your determination to save your child."

"I'll write to Tabitha this morning, sir, directly I've done my marketing. Lisbeth didn't sleep five minutes all last night. I was only sleeping a dog-sleep myself, and could hear that poor child tossing about—she has her little bed in my room, you know, sir—and this morning she looks as white as a ghost. It's heart-breaking. We used to be so happy together."

"Till womanhood came, and she had a heart to break," thought Arden.

Walter Arden knew his sister's habits, and that his best chance of finding her at home was after five o'clock, at which hour her friends—"pals," as she called them—dropped in for tea and gossip, to discuss the last scandal, or the newest dressmaker, or the book which everybody was talking about and very few people were reading, second-hand and third-hand, and fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-hand opinions being

bandied about in discussions that gave an impression of culture, without any preliminary trouble in the way of reading. Impressionism was the note in Lady Mary Selby's circle. Women who were not pretty gave the impression of beauty, were lovely by hypnotic suggestion, and imposed upon their little world. Men with a smattering of modern literature, and a faint flavour of Greek and Latin poetry, gave an impression of profound scholarship.

A man of one book assumed the dimensions of a Voltaire. People who were all but insolvent gave the impression of millions. Everybody was willing to be impressed. Nobody asked for particulars. In Lady Mary's superior set there was no such vulgar element as plain facts, plain figures, or common sense.

Mr. Selby was a stockbroker, and one of the reputed millionaires; though most people who knew him had an idea of his wealth as a huge eccentric figure, like an inverted pyramid, or the Loggan Rock, tremulous upon its narrow base, and were prepared at any time to read in the evening papers that he had thrown himself under an express engine, or blown out his brains in his own dressing-room. In the mean time they rallied round his dinner-table, shot over his moor, and courted his wife, who had shown herself so far what her friends called level-headed.

The Selby house was one of the most spacious in Grosvenor Square, where most of the houses are spacious. Arden found Lady Mary at the end of a suite of four drawing-rooms that made a glittering vista in the light of four wood-fires, burning on open hearths, dazzling with the reflected glow on amber tiles. The tall windows were curtained with amber satin, sofas and chairs were of the same brilliant hue, and the general effect gave the idea of a house of gold.

"Selby likes to show us the colour of his money," said one of the over-educated butterflies who fluttered round Lady Mary's tea-table.

The tea-table was in an octagon room at the end of the suite, a room in which the water-colour pictures and the rose du Barry Sèvres were said to be of incalculable value. The candles on the mantelpiece and a shaded lamp on the table were the only light in the room, though the London dusk was gathering outside.

The Conflict.

It was a quarter to six, and Lady Mary's friends were taking leave; a fluttering knot of fashionably dressed women, tall, large, imposing; and three small emaciated men, of the elderly young order, bald, etiolated, *débonnaire*, faultless in dress and demeanour; with the perfection of the present hour, which would be imperfection next year.

"Be sure you ask for the book. It's a revelation," said one of the small men, pressing Lady Mary's hand with the solicitude of a physician offering a parting counsel.

"You have really read it?"

"I reviewed it for the *St. George's*."

"I knew it must be you! Your review was a poem. I shan't read the book. I know it would fall short of the review."

"Don't forget to try Lady Cynthia," urged one of the large women. "She has adorable tea-gowns. She is immensely clever, and she puts brain-power into her frocks, don't you know."

"Oh, I shall give her an order. She had everybody at her tea-party. But do you think she will ever make the business pay?"

"Who knows? Her rent for that flat in Mount Street is four hundred and fifty; but she charges atrociously."

They went at last, one airy trifler after another, lingering for little subdued murmurings in Lady Mary's ear, questions, promises, counsels, confidences, the men slipping out in advance and leaving the ground clear.

They were all gone, and Mary had time to shake hands with her brother.

"It's ages since I have seen you," she said, filling a cup from a small Queen Anne teapot, which a footman had brought after Arden's arrival.

"That's because you don't take the trouble to look at your friends. It is not four and twenty hours since I saw you."

She looked puzzled for a few moments, and then a troubled expression came over her face.

"Oh, I suppose you were at the theatre last night," she said. "If so, I hope you were not as bored as I was."

"No; I was keenly interested."

"In a hashed-up Palais Royal farce?"

"No; in a man who was with you."

"Colonel Manville? I had asked three people, and he was the only one who turned up."

"I want you to tell me all about him."

"Why, what interest can you have in the man?"

He could detect the artificial carelessness in her tone; and it pained him acutely to think that the dangerous influence of a bad man had touched his sister's life, less intensely no doubt, but as certainly as it had touched Lisbeth Berry.

"I have a strong reason for being interested, a reason that does not concern you in any way."

"How should it concern me? The man is nothing to me. He is a friend of my husband's—hardly a friend—a chance acquaintance."

"Tell me all you know about him, Mary."

"Not unless you tell me your reason for wanting to know."

"My reason is very simple. I believe the man to be hunting down a girl—a young and innocent girl—in whose welfare I am interested."

He saw his sister's face grow pale in the lamplight, and saw a sudden distress in her lips and eyes. It was worse than he had thought. This man must have acquired an influence full of peril. And Mary Selby had held her head high hitherto. No speck of the world's filth had ever bespattered her name. Mated with a man who had nothing to recommend him but his wealth, she had been admirable as a wife, amiable, accommodating, grateful for his boundless indulgence, and to all appearance satisfied with her lot.

"Hunting down an innocent girl!" she echoed. "Isn't that rather a sensational way of talking—like a shilling shocker, or an Adelphi melodrama? Hunting down!" she repeated, with a satirical laugh; "whom does he hunt, and how?"

"The girl is my landlady's daughter—a widow's ewe-lamb."

"Oh, that kind of ewe-lamb, brought up in a West End lodging-house, must know how to take care of herself. She must have seen life."

"This girl has been reared in seclusion, and knows nothing of life."

"And how do you come to know that Colonel Manville

—a man of the world, past forty—is interesting himself in your landlady's daughter?"

"I have the evidence of my eyes, as well as the girl's own story. You may remember that Colonel Manville left your box during the last *entre-acte*, and was absent for some time."

"Was he?" she asked, with well-acted indifference, were it not for the contraction of the lips, which too surely indicated mental pain. "Yes, I remember."

"Well, during that interval he was sitting in the upper circle talking to my landlady's daughter—a girl of eighteen, romantic, ignorant of the world's ways—an easy victim."

"Absurd! What does he want with victims? A man who has lived half a long life among the most attractive women in Europe."

"He has set himself to win that girl—to destroy her, I mean—for he has won her. She worships him."

"Was the creature alone in the theatre?"

"No; she had a girl-friend with her."

"And Colonel Manville amused himself with talking to these two girls——"

"Talking to this one girl. He scarcely addressed the other."

"He was chaffing her, as you men call it, I dare say, amusing himself with such a piece of simplicity, reared in a London lodging-house. Why do you trouble yourself about such nonsense, Walter? Colonel Manville had forgotten her existence, perhaps, before the play was over."

"He waited at the door after he had seen you to your carriage. He had planned a midnight walk with the two girls—or with one, if he could get rid of the other. He followed and watched on the opposite side of the street while I walked home with them."

"I congratulate you upon an unsuspected talent."

"What do you mean?"

"You have missed a grand career. You ought to have been a private detective."

"Your sarcasm does not offend me. I was at the theatre last night to make a discovery, and I made it. I am not ashamed of the means, since the end was good."

"You are in love with the girl yourself, I suppose."

"I am surprised that you should be petty enough to make such a suggestion. I am sorry for the girl's mother, who has implored me to save an idolized child from ruin. Won't you help me, Mary, in a good work?"

"What am I to do? Remonstrate with Colonel Manville, the next time I meet him in society, for his indiscreet attentions to your landlady's daughter?"

"Tell me what you know of the man."

"He is the son of a Russian merchant. His father lives in retirement at a place in Berkshire, very old, and very rich. Colonel Manville was in the Russian Imperial Guard; but he is a cosmopolitan, talks four or five languages without any foreign accent, and is as much at home in Rome and Vienna as in Paris or London. He is a man of the world, in fact, and to my idea the very last man to hunt down cockney insipidities such as your landlady's ewe-lamb."

"Thank you for your information, my dear Mary. I dare say I shall hear something of the man's character at my Club," answered Arden, as he rose to go.

"Where, after bridge, I suppose your principal amusement is to vivisect the manners and morals of absent members."

"That is an old idea of your sex. Good night."

"Good night. I don't press you to stay, as I want an hour's sleep before I dress for a little friendly dinner—one of those out-of-the-season dinners, which are so much nicer than the big feasts."

"At which you will meet Colonel Manville, perhaps?"

"Not unlikely. He goes almost everywhere. Don't forget your engagement to me."

"Certainly not. But I hope your dinner is not to be a big feast. The long invitation looks ominous."

"We have no big dinners in November. The long invitation was to meet Villeneuve, the new French novelist, more Parisian and more audacious than the strongest of the old set. He is coming to London for ten days, and will dine here to meet the chosen few. I hope you have read his latest, 'Femme Funeste'?"

"I have not opened one of his books, though I have seen them lying about in the Club library. I relish no French novelist since Balzac."

"My poor Walter, you are a bundle of old-fashioned prejudices."

Arden dined and spent the evening at his Club, where he was fortunate in meeting the man he considered most likely to give him the information he wanted.

Mr. de Courcy Smythe had begun life in the diplomatic service, with assured means and brilliant prospects, but had never risen higher than Secretary of Legation, and on reaching the very mature age of fifty-five had exchanged the cares of diplomacy for the pleasures of idleness, a wanderer in sunny lands, or a lounger in London, as whim dictated. He was a man who had been everywhere, had seen everything, and was reputed to know all about everybody.

"Konstantin Manville? Yes, of course. I saw something of him in Paris three winters ago. He had an apartment near the Madeleine, and gave card suppers. His food and wine were unsurpassable, but the play was too high for me. One met all the cleverest and wickedest people in Paris."

"Ladies among them, perhaps?"

"The feminine element was not wanting."

"What kind of man is he?"

"A giant in brain and body. A giant with a magnetic power, which makes all other men seem pigmies. A modern Mirabeau, with the advantage of being handsome instead of ugly."

"A dangerous man where women are concerned," suggested Arden.

Smythe looked at him curiously. "My dear fellow," he said hastily, "if you have heard any ill-natured gossip about——"

He was going to say about Lady Mary Selby, when Arden interrupted him.

"There is a girl—a simple inexperienced girl of the humble classes, whom this man is pursuing——"

"Oh!" said Smythe, very glad he had not gone farther. "That kind of girl would have a very poor chance with Manville."

"I mean to save her."

"Then you'd better get her on board an Australian steamer to-morrow, and despatch her to the Antipodes.

She *may* be safe from him there, since it wouldn't be worth his while to follow her."

"Is he married?"

"No; never married—a colossal butterfly, flitting from flower to flower."

"Was he brought up in Russia?"

"No; he was born and raised here—was at Eton as a small boy; went to Petersburg in his teens, and was given a commission in the Imperial Guard, served in the Army for nine or ten years, rose to the rank of major, and then came to grief—an intrigue with the colonel's wife; the colonel disappeared one snowy night, and was found a month later in the Neva. It was an ugly business; and though nobody went so far as to suspect murder, Major Manville had to leave the Russian Army, and very soon found it convenient to leave Russia. I don't think he has ever re-crossed the frontier."

"How does he come by the rank of Colonel?"

"He commanded a yeomanry regiment in Berkshire, where his father has a good deal of property."

"What manner of man is the father?"

"A man without conscience or creed—engrained with sin. But he has thriven upon iniquity. He is past ninety, and looks good for another decade. He shows himself in London once or twice a year at some famous book sale, buying rare books of the kind they call 'curious;' a wonderful example of longevity, full of energy, with the eyes of an eagle, and a frame of iron. These Manvilles are a long-lived race. Konstantin boasts of his descent from a line of centenarians."

"Is the old man like him?"

"Yes; it is the same face—the same colossal frame. Konstantin senior has lived as adventurous a life as Konstantin junior. He inherited a business worth a million, and his mercantile career was finished before middle age. He exchanged the counting-house for a life of profligate indulgence that spread itself over civilized Europe, from the Seine to the Golden Horn. He was past fifty before he met the woman he married."

"Was she a Russian?"

"She was the star of a café concert on the Paris boulevard."

"A fallen star?"

"One naturally supposes so. She lived with her husband a year and a half, presented him with a son, and eloped with a Wallachian prince while the infant was cutting his teeth. She was a Provençale, a magnificent creature, with an alabaster skin and eyes of fire. All Paris had gone mad about her before Manville succumbed to her charm."

"And for character?"

"A wicked witch. They were a well-matched couple—witch and devil."

Arden was startled by words that so strangely recalled his dream of the previous night—"Witch and devil!"

Again he saw the Scythian desert, the women with wild hair and burning eyes, the yawning pit of hell.

IV.

Mrs. Berry did not lose an hour before acting upon Arden's advice. The peril of an idolized daughter gave the mother unwonted energy and decision. The marauding wolf was on the path of the lamb, and the rescue must needs be prompt and speedy. Mrs. Berry left her house and her lodgers to the care of her two servants for a whole day, an almost unexampled proceeding on her part, and took Lisbeth to her aunt's cottage on the outskirts of a village near Woking, a rustic spot, where the air was health-giving and the solitude unbroken. She carried her daughter off in this sudden manner on the pretence of anxiety about her health, and gave Lisbeth no hint of Arden's communication; but the girl had no doubt that her mother had been told of all that occurred at the theatre and after, and she submitted to the inevitable with a sullen acquiescence which was new to her character. Between the indulgent mother and the loving daughter there had opened an abyss which made them seem as strangers. The mother's heart ached with pity; the daughter seemed indifferent, coldly repulsing every expression of tenderness, averting her eyes from the eyes that sought hers with anxious love, shrinking into her corner of the railway carriage, and turning all her thoughts inward, to brood upon the image of the man whose name she knew not, but whose influence had changed her life from humdrum reality to a romantic dream.

"How long am I to stop with Aunt Tabitha?" she asked, as the train drew near Woking.

"Only till you have got back your health, dear. It is only for your health I am parting with you."

"That's nonsense, mother. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Oh, Lisbeth, how can you say that, when you have such restless nights, and look so white and wretched, and seem so low-spirited?"

"I can't help being miserable sometimes; and I shall be much more miserable in the country than in London."

"No, no, you won't, darling. There'll be nothing to upset you, or to make you unhappy in Tabitha's pretty home. You'll soon get back your good health in the fine country air. I know your aunt will be very kind to you."

"I don't care whether she's kind or unkind. I shall be miserable till you let me go home again."

Tabitha Berry was at the station with a fly, and she gave mother and daughter an affectionate welcome. Mrs. Berry's letter of the previous night had acquainted her with her niece's peril, and the girl came to her as a kind of state prisoner. She was by no means a sour or pedantic spinster, but a genial, comfortable person, carrying about her the large and liberal ideas of the noble household in which she had served for the greater part of her life, and where all the machinery of existence was worked upon generous lines. She was proud of her cottage, which she had made a cosy nest for her declining years, prouder of her garden, and proudest of her poultry-yard, where she reared specimens of the superior breeds which obtained on her late mistress's estate, forty miles away, in North Hampshire, whence, under Providence, all Tabitha's blessings were derived, even her little maid-of-all-work, who was the daughter of an under-gardener at the great house.

In a confidential talk with the anxious mother, Tabitha promised to keep watch and ward over her niece. They would take their walks together on the common, and she would hardly let Lisbeth out of her sight.

"You'll find she'll soon get over her foolish fancy when she doesn't see the fellow," Tabitha opined, not having a high estimate of the influence or attractiveness of the superior sex. "She'll get her health back with country air and country living, and she'll come round, and begin to wonder how she ever cared for him."

Solaced in some small measure by these cheering prognostications, Mrs. Berry went back to the lodging-house, and the daily cares and toils that made the hours seem

short, and brought restful nights to the toiler. The little back parlour seemed sadly dull without Lisbeth; but the busy housekeeper had scant leisure for sitting by her lonely hearth, and in her few intervals of rest generally dropped asleep over a newspaper, so that she suffered less from the absence of this beloved companion than a mother in the idle classes would have done. The days were dull days, but they passed quickly, and never seemed quite long enough for the work that had to be got through.

And now it was spring again, the bleak early spring of crocuses and snowdrops, before the promise of leaves on the black branches in the park; but spring with days of bright sunshine that called for clean muslin curtains in all the windows, and much carpet-beating, and diligent polishing of the old substantial furniture.

Tabitha's letters had been brief, but satisfactory. Her niece was improving in health, and was not difficult to manage. They went for long walks together every afternoon; and the vicar's lady had invited Lisbeth to an entertainment at the schoolhouse. The vicar had called twice, and had seemed very much taken with Lisbeth, when he found she read and appreciated his favourite poets.

Lisbeth's own letters had been cold and unloving. She had only written when urgently entreated by her mother, who sat down in the midst of her day's work to pour out the feelings of her anxious heart to the child she loved.

"You can't suppose I like to be without you, Liz," she wrote. "There's not a glimmer of joy in my life while you're away. I just drudge on, day after day, and try to please my lodgers, and make my house nicer than anybody else's, and that's all. And I do that for your sake—to make a comfortable home for you, and to leave you with the means of making a good living, if you never marry. I care for nothing else, till I get you home again. All the clean curtains are up, and the chintz chair-covers have been calendered. Mr. Arden's rooms look lovely. He gave me half the price of a Persian carpet for his library, and, what with his books and a new lamp he bought the other day, the room is something to be proud of. My second floor has told me he means to stay on, as my cooking pleases him; and his lordship will keep the ground-floor

all the year, though he doesn't come back from Cannes till April, and will be away in Scotland all August and September. So you see everything is going on well, darling; and I only want my sweet daughter home and quite happy in her mind to think myself the luckiest woman in London."

"What's the use of saying you want me home if you don't send for me?" Lisbeth wrote. "As for my being happy, that's more than I ever expect to be. There's very little happiness in life for people in our position. We are just the dust of the earth, for other people to tread under foot. We see all the pleasures of life pass by us, like the carriages in the streets, and we have no share in them. We are born to be lookers-on. I have seen women look at me out of their carriage windows—beautifully dressed women—look at me and not see me, as they look at the bricks in the walls or the mud on the pavements; and I am sick of a life which means being despised and counted as nothing."

Such letters as these chilled Mrs. Berry's heart. What could she do for her girl? What could her housekeeping cares, the labour of her hands, accomplish for the idol of her heart? She thought she had done much in making a lady of her daughter, dressing her neatly and prettily, keeping her from contact with low people, keeping all sordid labour from those delicate hands. And the result was bitter discontent. She could do no more. She had to confess herself beaten.

There came a week without any letter from Tabitha, who had hitherto written every Sunday evening; and on Mrs. Berry writing to ask the reason, a hasty scrawl from Lisbeth told her that her aunt was confined to her room with an attack of asthma, and that she, Lisbeth, was helping to nurse her.

This was bad news for the mother. What of the promised watch and ward, now that the warder was laid up? If the enemy had by any chance discovered Lisbeth's retreat, Tabitha's illness would give him his opportunity. Mrs. Berry carried the letter to Arden, who recommended her to go to Woking without delay, and see for herself the state of things there. It might be safer to bring her daughter back to London, than to leave her in the country without due supervision.

Mrs. Berry assented to this view all the more readily because of her yearning for her daughter's presence. The letter arrived by the five-o'clock post; and she was making her hurried preparations for the little journey when there came a telegram that made her helpless from agitation.

"*Lisbeth gone away—seen on road to station—Tabitha.*"

Mrs. Berry rushed upstairs with the telegram in her hand, and only controlled her excitement on arriving at Arden's door, so far as to knock respectfully and wait for permission to enter.

"Oh, sir, I am too late! She has run away!"

Arden looked at the telegram, and tried to take a cheerful view of the case.

"She may be coming straight home," he said. "You say she has been asking to come home. She may have taken the law into her own hands."

"But she would have told Tabitha if she was coming home. Oh, sir, what had I better do? I feel too bewildered to think. My poor brain is in a whirl."

"You had better go to Woking as you intended, and find out all you can. I will go to Vauxhall and wait there till midnight if necessary, to watch the arrival of the Woking trains. If Lisbeth is in one of them, I will bring her home, and take care of her till you return."

"Oh, sir, you are all goodness; but it seems like imposing upon you——"

"No, no. I am very glad to be of use. Evil shall not come to your daughter if I can help it."

Arden took Mrs. Berry to Waterloo in a cab, saw her seated in a second-class carriage for Woking, and went in the same train to Vauxhall, where he was prepared to spend some wearisome hours as best he might, with the help of the daily papers and such luxury as was offered by the general waiting-room. On the other hand, it was likely that Lisbeth might soon appear upon the scene.

Tabitha's telegram had been sent at 5.50. It was now half-past seven; and there was a Woking train due in ten minutes. If Lisbeth was on her way to the station when the message was despatched, this was the time when she would be likely to arrive.

The train came slowly in—a long train, with many passengers—and the lengthy business of ticket-collecting began. There were very few people on the platform, and among them there was no figure bearing the faintest resemblance to Konstantin Manville. Assured of this fact, Arden walked slowly past the carriages, peering into each, and less than halfway from the end of the train he discovered the agitated face of Lisbeth looking out of a second-class carriage. She was calling for a porter to unlock the door, and on its being opened she sprang out hastily, and stood gazing up and down the platform in a distracted way, evidently expecting to see some one who was not there. Disappointment, chagrin, bewilderment, were depicted on her countenance as her eyes roamed up and down the distance, and then a sudden look of terror came into her face at sight of Arden.

"Come, Lisbeth," he said quietly, "I'll get you a cab, and see you safely home."

"Thank you, sir; but I am not going home."

"Yes, you are, Lisbeth. I have promised your mother to take care of you. She was sadly distressed, poor soul, at hearing you had left your aunt; but I knew you must mean to come home."

He held her arm, gently but firmly, as he led her towards the flight of stairs by which they had to leave the station, but at the bottom of the stairs she stopped suddenly, and cried out—

"My bag, sir! I left my bag in the carriage. I must go back for it."

"No; I'll get it. Stay here. Don't stir till I come back."

He placed her in a sheltered angle by the ticket-collector, out of the way of the traffic. He looked along the hall, from the door at one end to the door at the other. There was no Colonel Manville in sight. He hurried upstairs, and had just time to spring into the empty compartment and snatch a bag from the rack. The train was moving as he left it, and as the engine steamed out he heard a loud cry from the porters at the London end of the station, and saw a tall figure push its impetuous way through the crowd waiting on the platform.

"What's the matter?" he asked an inspector, as he hurried towards the staircase.

"Man crossed the line from the down platform, sir, close in front of the engine. I thought he was done for. He only just cleared it, jumped on to the platform, and ran this way like a flash of lightning, just this instant."

Arden was at the bottom of the stairs before the man had left off talking. The ticket-collector was in his place; but the angle behind him was empty. Lisbeth was gone.

"What has become of the lady I left here just now?" Arden asked.

"Gone away this minute, sir, with a tall man. I think they went to look for a cab."

Arden hurried to the door. A hansom was driving rapidly towards Vauxhall Bridge, and there was no other cab in sight. Arden followed across the bridge at a run, and met an empty hansom just as he was losing sight of the cab he was pursuing. He had scarcely breath enough to tell the driver to give chase, as he sprang into the vehicle.

"A sovereign if you overtake that cab," he gasped, pointing to the vanishing hansom.

The man swung his horse round, and started at a gallop, the cab swaying from side to side. He contrived to keep the hansom in sight for the next five or six minutes, but by that time his horse flagged. The pace was beyond him.

"They've got too much of a start, sir," the man said, lifting the shutter. "It can't be done. Shall I drive to Victoria? They're going that way."

"Yes, yes, to Victoria, South Eastern platform, as fast as you can go."

The continental express was on the point of starting as Arden went on to the platform, doors banging, station-master and inspectors on the *qui vive*. He had just time to run half the length of the train before the first slow solemn beats of the locomotive carried the mass of eager humanity out into the darkness of the night; and in that short span, breathless, desperate at his defeat, he saw Lisbeth's pale face looking out of an open window, with Manville standing in the shadow behind her, the tall form leaning forward over her shoulder, the falcon eyes searching the crowd on the platform.

She was gone; the power of evil had been stronger than the power of good. And Arden had to face the unhappy mother, when she came back after her useless journey, and to tell her that her child was lost.

He went straight to Scotland Yard, obtained the address of a certain Mr. George Jackman, a retired member of the Criminal Investigation Force, now practising the subtle arts of private inquiry, and put the case in his hands, giving a minute description of the girl, together with the name, position, and personal characteristics of the man she was travelling with.

"I have heard something of Colonel Manville in Paris, where he's better known than in London," said the detective. "I'm afraid there's not much chance of getting the better of him. Do you want him to marry the young lady, or do you want to get her away from him?"

"I want to get her away from him. The idea of marriage is hopeless, and would mean misery for her if it were possible. I want you to follow them to Paris, or farther, if they go beyond Paris. I would hunt them down myself, if I knew how. It isn't a question of sparing myself trouble. But you have the art of trapping a fugitive——"

"I've run down a good many, sir. I'll do what I can in this case. I've friends in Paris—and at Marseilles—friends in the Police. Do you want me to start by the morning train?"

"By the very first train that will carry you."

"Good."

Arden gave him two five-pound notes, which were all the ready money he had about him, and offered to send further funds to any address the detective might give him.

The man wrote an address on the back of his card: "Chez M. Davout, Rue Matamore, 37 bis."

"Telegraph to me immediately if you find the girl; and don't let her out of your sight till I am on the spot to look after her," Arden said.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he left Mr. Jackman's office, and went back to Jermyn Street, heavy at heart, to tell the wretched mother that the worst had happened. The cherished only child, the joy and pride of lowly hearts, so carefully reared amidst humble surroundings, so fondly

loved, had gone the way that leads to perdition. And he knew that Mrs. Berry was a religious woman, a follower of severe evangelical pastors, with something of the old Puritan temper, and that for her sin was sin, and perdition here meant perdition hereafter. She had no wide modern ideas, no philosophical acceptance of humanity's weaknesses and errors, no belief in the indulgent theory that circumstances alter cases and excuse sins. To keep her daughter spotless from the world had been the fervent prayer of her life.

Arden knew this, and he had to tell her that her daughter had cast in her lot with the reprobates, a deliberate sinner.

He urged every argument that made for consolation; but the case admitted of little comfort.

"I will do all that can be done for her," he said. "If it is possible to save her, and bring her back to you, I will do it."

"Oh, sir, you have been very good. I know you will do what you can. But my girl is lost. If she comes back to me, she will seem like a stranger. I can never be proud of her again. I can never look in her face without feeling ashamed. I shall feel the shame, if she doesn't."

"She will feel it, you may be sure. If she comes back to you, she will come in sorrow and penitence. She will have nothing left her in this life except your pity and your love."

"Oh, sir, I don't know. She was like a stranger to me that last day when I took her to her aunt's cottage. And she has been false and deceitful—she that never told me a falsehood in her life till this misery came upon us. That man has been seen near the house late at night, and she has crept downstairs and gone out in the road to meet him when her aunt was in bed. The servant heard her, and looked out of the attic window and saw her walking with him. She only told her mistress this evening, after Lisbeth had gone. It happened three or four times in the dark nights last month. And then the girl saw and heard nothing more. And she wouldn't tell, because she was fond of Lisbeth."

"She ought to have spoken."

"Yes, of course she ought. She might have saved my darling if she had told her mistress what was going on.

But she is a silly feather-headed girl, and she could do nothing but cry and say that Lisbeth was always kind to her."

"Were any letters found?"

"Not a line. My sister-in-law had searched the house before I got there, though she ought not to have left her bed, poor thing, with her asthma. Oh, sir, if you could have travelled to Dover in the train with them—if you could have snatched her out of his arms!"

"Two minutes earlier and I would have made the attempt; but luck was against me. I was too late. If I had not been fool enough to go back for that wretched bag," added Arden, with a vindictive glance at the morocco travelling-bag, which he had brought home—a birthday present to Lisbeth from the indulgent mother, "she couldn't have given me the slip."

"It was very unfortunate, sir," said Mrs. Berry, in a voice broken by sobs.

She had never ceased crying throughout their conversation, and Arden knew that in the long watches of the night the mother's broken-hearted crying would go on; but that soon after daybreak to-morrow she would be on foot, looking after her servants, and slaving for her lodgers, and carrying her silent grief about with her wherever she moved; and he was intensely sorry for this patient sorrow for which comfort or hope seemed impossible.

Lady Mary Selby was at her villa on the Riviera. Arden had not seen her since her dinner-party for the famous novelist, as she left London for the South the next day. She was brilliant and full of clever talk at the head of the dinner-table, airing the Parisian French of which she was so proud, with the novelist on her right hand; but her brother could see the shadow behind the brightness—a shade of discontent, weariness, satiety, the signs of an empty heart and a disappointed life.

Her husband, who was inordinately proud of her, saw only the shining surface.

"My wife is always at her best when she has literary swells about her. She adores men of genius, and she can talk to them on their own level," he told his friends,

pleased with his wife, his house, his wines, and everything that was his.

Mary was at Cannes, and there was nothing to be learnt from her. De Courcy Smythe had left London. Arden had failed in obtaining further details of Colonel Manville's life or character from any of his friends. Several people knew something about him; but the something was always the same outside knowledge that he had obtained from Smythe. Manville had not been seen about town during the winter. He was a cosmopolitan, and loved the sun. He might be in Rome, Naples, Constantinople, or Egypt.

For ten days the daily report from Jackman told only of failure. He had employed the Parisian police, and had followed up every possible clue, but without result, though he had reason to believe that Colonel Manville was in Paris. But on the eleventh day there came a letter of more significance.

"I have at last succeeded in meeting Colonel Manville, after keeping a close watch upon the club of which I discovered him to be a member. It is the fastest club in Paris, notorious for high play, and rows and scandals of all kinds. Some of the worst duels of the last ten years have been the result of quarrels in the card-room; and the club has the worst possible reputation with the police, though most of the swells belong to it, and everything about the establishment is the tip-top of fashion and luxury.

"Colonel Manville drove to the club at three o'clock yesterday afternoon, and did not leave till two this morning. I was in a café within sight of the door till midnight, and in the street afterwards. I followed him to a house in the Rue Royale, where he has rooms on the second floor, and where I have contrived to get on friendly terms with the *concierge*. Manville has been living in this house off and on during the winter—sometimes going away for as much as a fortnight or three weeks, but making Paris his headquarters. I believe the porter's statements may be relied upon. He told me that Colonel Manville had only returned to his rooms the day before yesterday, after an absence of more than a fortnight. Whether he was in some other quarter of Paris between the night when you saw him in the continental express and his return to his

lodgings, or whether he has been farther south with the young lady, and where she is living now, I have still to discover. Having found him, I feel hopeful of the result."

Three days later there came a telegram—

"*Lady found. Will meet the train arriving to-morrow morning, Gare du Nord.*"

The Conflict.

V.

WITHIN three hours after the receipt of the detective's telegram, Walter Arden was on his way to Paris. He told Mrs. Berry that her daughter was found, and begged her to hope for the best. The unhappy mother wanted to go with him, or at least to follow him next morning; but he succeeded in convincing her that it was best for him to be alone, and free to act as the circumstances of the hour might require. There might be difficulties in the way which would be increased by a woman's presence.

"If it is in me to do this thing, I will bring her back to you," he said, with intense earnestness. "All you have to do is to open your arms to her, and to forgive. And in God's own time you may both be able to forget."

"Oh, sir, I can never do that! I can never forget what she was to her father and me, and how proud we were of her. She has humbled me to the dust for the rest of my life—unless—unless he would marry her and make a lady of her."

"My poor friend, he won't do that. And if he would, she might be a miserable woman for the rest of her life."

"But she would be an honest woman. We shouldn't be ashamed to look in each other's faces, as we shall be if she comes home a ruined girl."

The poor creature broke into a flood of tears. She had borne up bravely in her daily drudgery since the night of the elopement, but the thought of the return crushed her.

Mr. Jackman was waiting in the stony greyness of the terminus, the grey light of a bleak March morning. The traveller had only a Gladstone bag and a hat-box, which had been passed through the customs at Calais. He and

Jackman were sitting side by side in a *coupé* driving towards the Rue de Rivoli, five minutes after the arrival of the train

"I'm very glad you've come, sir. It's the only chance."

"Where is she?"

"In a respectable hotel on the other side of the river."

"Alone?"

"No. She has a nurse with her—a Sister of Charity."

"And where is Manville? How did you get her away from him?"

"There was no difficulty about that. He has cast her off, I suppose."

"Cast her off—in Paris—a helpless girl? What an incarnate fiend!"

"I believe that's about the size of it, sir."

"You suppose!—you believe! But you must know what he has done."

"No, I don't, sir. No more will you for some time to come. The poor young lady is off her head. She won't be able to give much of an account of herself. It's a sad story."

"Where did you find her?"

"On the quay, by the flower-market, in the midst of a crowd, about this time yesterday morning, when I was starting for my day's business in the Rue Royale. My diggings are on that side of the river, in the Rue Matamore, near the boul. Mich, as they call it—the students' boulevard, you know, sir."

"Yes, yes; I know."

"There was a crowd of flower-girls and bargemen, and a rag-picker or two, and I found that one of the bargemen had just picked a girl out of the river. She had thrown herself from the bridge right in the middle of the stream; and the man had been precious quick jumping off his barge, or he would not have saved her. She was lying on the ground, with her head in a woman's lap; and directly I saw the long red hair and the small pale face, I knew she was the girl that was wanted. She was very bad, but she had been got out of the water in time. We carried her into a chemist's shop on the quay, and a doctor came and looked after her, and presently she was able to speak, and said a few words in a rambling light-headed way; and when I heard her talk English, I was all the more sure of her.

"'It's all right, Miss Lisbeth,' I said, not wanting to give away her surname; and she started at the sound of her name, and looked at me with a ray of sense in her eyes. The doctor saw that I knew her name, and supposed that I was a friend; so he made no difficulty about my taking charge of her, especially as I asked him to recommend a quiet hotel where I could take her, and to find me a hospital-nurse to look after her. He said that she was very bad, and would need a great deal of care. He thought she must have been in a bad way before she threw herself into the river, for, considering how short a time she had been in the water, the shock and the immersion were not enough to account for her state. He asked me if she was right in her mind, and I told him that, to the best of my belief, she was in possession of her reason when she left London, a fortnight ago."

"She was mad enough to rush headlong to destruction," said Arden, gloomily.

"The doctor said she must have gone through some terrible experience in the mean time to account for her present condition. We put her in a cab and took her to the hotel he recommended, where I was able to get a couple of rooms on the third floor, looking into a courtyard, and very quiet; and then the doctor went off to get a nurse. He is a young man, but he seems to know what he is about. He looks poor, and practises in a poor quarter; but I think he is the right sort of man for the case, in the interests of the young lady and her friends."

"Have you seen her since yesterday morning?" Arden asked.

"I saw her late last night. There was no change. She had taken no food, and had had no sleep, and had been talking in a wild way, the nursing-sister said."

"You are sure she is Lisbeth Berry?"

"I don't think there's room for doubt. She agrees in every particular with the description I wrote down from your dictation, and I found a handkerchief marked L.B."

"Had she any money about her?"

"Half a sovereign and a little English silver, in a netted silk purse."

"Ought I to send for her mother?"

"You may think yourself bound to do so if she doesn't get better soon; but in her present condition there wouldn't be much use in the mother coming, and it would be very painful for her. I'm afraid the doctor thinks the girl may end her days in a lunatic asylum."

"God grant he may be mistaken. And how is Manville to be brought to answer for his crime? What can the law do to him?"

"I'm afraid the law can't touch him. I think you said that Miss Berry is nineteen years of age."

"She was nineteen on the tenth of January."

"Then she is of an age to answer for her own actions, in the eye of the law. It is not a case of abduction."

"And he might tempt her away from her home, slay her soul and body, reduce her to madness, and throw her out in the streets of a foreign city—a girl who had never left her mother's care, till this wretch lured her away—and there is nothing in all that sum of infamy for which he can be made answerable to the law?"

"No; when a woman makes up her mind to run away with a man, it is the fortune of war. He may treat her as vilely as he pleases. She has no resource except to leave him; for the streets or the river, if she has nowhere else to go. It is to this young woman's credit that she chose the river."

"She was a pure-minded girl, innocent as a child, before that devil hunted her down."

They had crossed the Seine, had driven by the quay and the Rue des Saints Pères, and were now in a quiet street within the shadow of St. Sulpice, where the cab stopped in front of the Hôtel Loyola, an old-fashioned house, without any of the flashy splendours of the modern hotel. Jackman led the way through a square hall, with windows opening on a courtyard, up a circular staircase to the third floor, where he knocked at a door in a narrow corridor. All was curiously sombre and quiet; and they had come so far without seeing any sign of life.

"Entrez," said a voice; and they went into a small low-ceiled room, furnished as a *salon*, but with a bed in an alcove. A nursing-sister, in black robe and hood, was standing on the threshold of an inner room as they entered; and Arden

heard a low, piteous murmuring in a voice that he knew for Lisbeth's, a murmur that was like a moan of pain.

"No better, sister?" asked Jackman.

"Hélas, no, monsieur. She has not closed an eye all the night, and I have had to feed her by force, poor thing! She would take nothing of her free will. And she is so wasted for want of nourishment. It is pitiful to see her."

The change was pitiful indeed to the eyes of Walter Arden, when he stood at the bedside and looked at the spectral face on the pillow, the wild wide-open eyes, with a look of unspeakable horror in them. Could this wasted wreck of womanhood be Lisbeth, the girl who had looked at him in the autumn starlight with eyes aflame, defying him, strong in her love for the wretch who was to be her destroyer?

Words of unreason came from the white lips, inconsecutive fragments of speech, and whatever scrap of meaning it was possible to extract from that delirious babble was significant of horror and loathing.

"Well, sir," said the detective, when Arden went back to him in the outer room, "I suppose there has been no mistake. This is the person you want."

"Yes—this is my landlady's daughter. A sad sight for the mother, if I send for her; and yet I think she ought to come—and without delay."

"You are the best judge of that, sir. I should give the young lady a few days first. She may come round a bit with good nursing. And now, I suppose you have no further need for my services?"

"Yes, I have—great need. You say you know Paris well?"

"Yes, I know Paris—the best and the worst of it."

"Good. Then I want you to find out where this girl has been—how she has been treated—what cruelty has brought her to the state in which you found her."

"Very well, sir. I'll do my best. Give me forty-eight hours. I'll meet you here, the day after to-morrow—at twelve o'clock."

"That will do."

Arden sat by Lisbeth's bed for an hour, while the sister went about her work, making beef-tea and lemonade, dusting the furniture, in the silence and gloom of rooms looking

into a stony well, three stories deep, where shuttered or curtained windows stared across at each other.

"This hotel seems quite empty," he said, wondering at the stillness.

"No, monsieur, the hotel is full of people; but they are mostly priests from the provinces, who have business out of doors all day, and who come in and out very quietly. It is a most respectable hotel, and all the best of the provincial clergy come here."

The doctor came while Arden was sitting there. He was intelligent and sympathetic, and Arden told him of his uncertainty as to whether the mother ought to be summoned to the girl's bedside. He explained her position, and what an upheaval it would be for her to leave London, a woman whose living depended upon strict attention to her household, and who had never been out of England.

"My hope is that I may be able to take her daughter back to London in a few days, with the help of an English nurse, whom I can bring here at twenty-four hours' notice," Arden said.

The doctor approved of the idea, if his patient rallied, and if the brain-trouble could be cured.

It might not be so serious as he had feared yesterday, and might pass with the slight amount of fever which he still found; but the fever was not enough to account for the brain-trouble, which he believed to be the result of a mental shock.

Arden urged him to call in a specialist; and it was arranged that one of the cleverest mental doctors in Paris should see Lisbeth in the course of that evening. Meanwhile, Arden would telegraph to London for a nurse, and would write to Mrs. Berry.

He told her that her daughter was very ill, but in no danger; that she was in comfortable lodgings, in the hotel where he himself was staying, and in charge of an excellent nurse; that he was sending to London for an English nurse to travel with her; and that he would bring her to Jermyn Street directly she was well enough to be moved. He kept nothing from the anxious mother, except the terrible fact of the wandering brain, which was the worst feature of the case.

Would that distraught brain ever recover the light of reason? That was the question he asked himself later in the day, when, having written his letter and telegrams, and engaged a room on the first floor of the hotel, he sat in the shadow and stillness of the sick-room, while the good sister, who had been on guard for a day and a night, slept peacefully on the bed in the *salon*. He had promised her that he would not leave her patient till she came to relieve guard, and had told her that before to-morrow evening there would be another nurse to share her duties, a trained nurse from a London institution.

"Not a *religieuse?*" she asked wonderingly.

"No. Our nurses are women of business; but they are good women all the same."

The patient had been quieter during the afternoon, and had slept a little. It had been an intense relief to the watcher when the white lips ceased to murmur strange senseless words, and when the eyelids had drooped over the wild stare of eyes that had not once looked at him with recognition, though he had called her by her name in low and earnest tones, and had spoken to her of her mother, trying by the intensity of sympathetic feeling to penetrate the mist that clouded her brain. He had elicited no ray of reason. The wild babble, or the dull moaning as of a soul in pain, had gone on till that blessed relief of slumber stole over her, sheer exhaustion of brain and body, no doubt. She awoke with a convulsive start and a shriek, and looked wildly round her, beating the air in a frenzy of terror.

"Devils, devils, devils!" she cried; "they are all devils—laughing devils, singing devils, dancing devils, dancing and drinking! Oh, the wine, the wine, the loathsome wine! look at it, running over them, drowning them; and they go on laughing. Their horrible eyes, their horrible flashing teeth—how they shine and sparkle! grinning devils, grinning at me—grinning at the lost wretch they have murdered."

Then, after an interval, in which she fell back exhausted, beating the air with her wild hands, as if she were beating off some horrible assailant, her voice rang out again, loud and shrill, no longer the muffled, inconsecutive babble of the pale tremulous lips.

"Take me away from them! Have mercy upon me!

You are the Prince of Devils; take me out of this hell! Take me out of the pit of death! Cruel, cruel, cruel! You have killed my soul. I thought love was heaven. Oh, I loved you, I loved you! I gave my soul for your love; and now I know that love is hell. Why didn't they tell me? Why didn't they warn me, years ago when I was a child? I would never have listened to those sweet, sweet words—never have believed—if I had known that devils could speak with the voice of angels, and lure me into the pit of hell! Not one glimpse of heaven—not one hour of happiness; only the fiery pit of hell—flames that burn the soul, and the worm that never dies—the worm that is eating my heart."

Over and over again he heard the same wild thoughts, sometimes in the same words, sometimes with a frantic eloquence that startled him. The girl's evangelical training revealed itself in her hour of madness—a brain steeped in the language of the Psalmist and the Hebrew Prophets, the exalted phrases, the grand words, the poetical images of the Old Testament, the fierce reprobation of sin, the self-abasement of the sinner, conscious of his fall. "Out of the depths have I cried to Thee!" said the wretched girl. "My sins are as scarlet. I have gone down into hell. I have kept company with devils. I am steeped to the lips in their impieties. I am not fit to see the sunshine or the light of God's day. In the great Day of Judgment, when the last trumpet sounds, I shall be lying in a loathsome heap with the daughters of sin, and my soul will go down to the everlasting hell."

Her frenzied raving had not ceased when the two doctors appeared upon the scene. Arden left them with the patient, and retired to the little *salon*, where the wearied nurse was sleeping soundly in the darkness of the curtained alcove. They were nearly half an hour in the sick-room, and both looked very grave as they came out.

The specialist told Arden that there was every indication of a permanent loss of reason. It was a case of that delirium without fever which means madness. Of course there was the possibility of cure. There are no cases more difficult than mental cases to pronounce upon with any degree of certainty. Having heard the circumstances of the patient, Dr. Veron was of opinion that she ought to be taken back to England and to her mother's care as soon as she had

recovered her bodily health sufficiently to bear the journey. It was not a case which he thought would call for confinement in a lunatic asylum ; as after this present violent stage the patient would in all probability lapse into an imbecile or semi-imbecile condition.

"What we have to hope," he concluded, "is that her state may not become melancholia, for that is one of the saddest and the most dangerous forms of mental derangement ; and in that case she might have to be placed under restraint."

"And you do not think it necessary to bring her mother here?"

"No. She is in no danger. Her strength will return in a few days, with good feeding, and sleep, which we shall bring about, I hope, without delay. The mother is not wanted here, or for the journey. You have sent for a trained nurse, I am told."

"A nurse is to cross from Dover to-night."

"And you have Sister Euphemia, a tower of strength. You will do very well. It is a sad case. The girl has been cruelly treated."

"Ah, monsieur, you cannot imagine the depth of her fall. She was brought up with such loving care—utterly innocent and inexperienced——"

"And she has been dragged through the depths of hell. There are worse murders on this earth than those that are done with dagger or poison. There was a name spoken by this girl in her ravings which was like a fiery red light across the darkness—the name of a woman of such unspeakable infamy that the slightest contact with her means destruction. If this unhappy girl has been plunged into the devil's kingdom where that woman is queen, I wonder at no frantic speech, no agony of horror and remorse."

"What is the woman's name?" Arden asked. "It might serve as a clue. Believe me, monsieur, I am not going to leave this girl's wrongs unavenged, if I can get at her destroyer by any possible means."

"The woman is known as La Poulpe, a fitting *sobriquet* for a wretch whose devouring arms have strangled the lives and fortunes of men. She was once a miracle of beauty, and she still retains some physical charm, and I believe is still admired by the fools and reprobates for whom the

supremacy of vice is a kind of royalty. Ask any friend of yours who knows his Paris what chance an innocent English girl would have if once she fell into the power of La Poulpe."

The physician took his fee, promised to see the patient after four days, by which time he believed she would be in a fit state to travel, and the two doctors departed.

Sister Euphemia slept till eleven o'clock, when she awoke, refreshed and ready for the night's watch. Lisbeth had been sleeping for the last hour, the result of a mild narcotic which the physician had sent from the nearest pharmacy. Arden went downstairs, and ate his supper at a table in the corner of the comfortable restaurant, where two jovial priests were chirruping over a bottle of Pomard at another table. It was the first substantial food he had taken since he left London.

The nurse arrived next morning, and having told her what was necessary about the case, and put her on friendly terms with the sister, Arden felt that his responsibilities towards Lisbeth were now considerably lessened. He meant to see her three or four times a day, to assure himself that she was receiving proper treatment, and for the rest he was free to go about Paris and do what he liked with his life. Unhappily all delights of the gay city, now full of its fashionable inhabitants, were a dead letter to him. He had no liking, no desire, except to bring Konstantin Manville to account for his crime against Lisbeth. Amusement on his own part, or interest in the amusements of others, was out of the question.

He roamed about Paris in a purposeless way, but spent most of his time in or near the Rue Royale, and lunched at a restaurant opposite the Madeleine ; but he did not meet Colonel Manville.

Mr. Jackman appeared at the Hôtel Loyola with com mendable punctuality.

"Well, what are your discoveries?" Arden asked eagerly, when he had taken the man to his own room—a large room on the first floor, where they were safe from the risk of interruption.

"I think I've made out the history of the case, sir—from the time when you saw Miss Berry leave Victoria to the

time when I saw her lying in her wet clothes on the quay; and it's a dire bad history. I don't know how much you know about Paris."

"As much as a steady-going Englishman who spends an occasional week at the Hôtel Meurice is likely to know."

"Ah, that means you know the respectable side of Paris. A good thing for you, sir, you don't know the other side. It may spare you a heart-ache. There are not many Englishmen who do know what we call subterranean Paris; but in my calling we have to know these things. Half our lives is spent burrowing underground, groping along the dark passages where vice hides and riots, out of ken and out of reach of the police—places where no police-officer's life is worth five minutes' purchase. That poor young woman has been underground, sir. If you knew the kind of gutter she has been dragged through, you wouldn't wonder that she tried to drown herself, and that her reason has given way."

Jackman spoke with a suppressed vehemence that showed strong feeling.

"I've a daughter about her age, sir," he said, as if in apology for his unprofessional emotion—"a daughter I've tried to bring up without the knowledge of sin, just as you say Miss Berry has been reared."

"What motive could he have had?" exclaimed Arden. "He was sure of his victim. Wasn't that enough?"

"No, sir, that wasn't enough. He wanted to make her like himself. He wanted to plunge her into the pandemonium which is his only idea of pleasure. He has run the gamut of ordinary wickedness. Nothing less than underground Paris would satisfy him—the eccentric, the diabolical, men and women who have educated themselves in all the arts and devices of hell."

"She has spoken a name in her delirium—La Poulpe. I am told it is the name of a monster of impurity."

"La Poulpe! Yes, it was in that woman's hellish crew he flung the unhappy girl. He wanted to make her like them. Her simplicity soon palled upon him, no doubt. I traced his movements from his arrival in Paris with Miss Berry. I had the police to help me, you see, sir. Colonel Manville is known to the police, and they keep an eye upon

him, though up to now he has never dropped into their net. They live in hopes. From them I found that he took Miss Berry straight to a small house on the outskirts of the forest near Marly le Roi—a cut-throat place, with no neighbours within a quarter of a mile. The house has been kept shut up for the last three years, mostly empty. There was no woman-servant, no one but his valet, a Russian, who goes everywhere with him. Three days later he was seen with the girl driving in a cab on the Boulevard Sebastopol, and she was seen afterwards in the house where Madame Loriston, *alias* La Poulpe, carries on her orgies; but what happened there, or how long she stayed, I have not been able to find out. I know nothing more of her till the morning she threw herself into the river."

"And you say the laws of France and England have no penalty for such a crime as his?"

"No; she is a woman, and a free agent. If she had got away from Madame Loriston's den and appealed to the police, she might have extricated herself sooner from that abominable crew, perhaps——"

"How should she know what to do, a girl of nineteen, who had never been called on to act for herself?"

"Ah, there's the pity of it! What could my girl do in the same circumstances? She would be lost as this girl has been. But there are not many such men as Manville, thank God. The world is not peopled with them. I've a fancy that sometimes the devil gets tired of hell, and puts himself into a human shape, and goes about the earth seeking whom he may devour, as he did in the time of Job. If we believe in Job, we're bound to believe in that sort of malicious devil."

"And you think this Manville is one of the devil's incarnations?" said Arden.

"That's about the size of it, sir," said Jackman, employing a favourite locution; "at least, to my fancy."

Arden remembered his dream of the hyperborean world peopled with devils and witches, a vision that was as vivid and seeming real in his mind now as it had been when he awoke and heard the church clock that measured the length of his slumber—so short a span, in which he had seemed to live through ages.

He paid the detective handsomely for his labours. There was nothing more that Jackman could do to help him. If retribution were possible, it must be the work of a private hand, secret and unaided.

Arden had written to Mrs. Berry telling her that he would take her daughter home as soon as she could bear the journey; and, the opinion of the specialist on his second visit being favourable to removal, it was arranged that Lisbeth and the nurse should leave Paris on the following morning, in charge of Arden. The patient's bodily strength had been considerably restored by sleep and scientific feeding, and the wild vehemence of the first two days had been followed by a kind of apathy which promised ill for the future, but which was easier to deal with in the present.

It was sad to see the delicate young face, upon which time had cast no shadow of the passing years, robbed of all beauty by the loss of expression, an ivory mask out of which gazed pale unseeing eyes, a drooping lip that looked as if it would never speak again. Arden watched her with a heavy heart as he sat opposite her in the railway carriage between Paris and Calais. She did not speak once during the journey, and submitted to the nurse's cares and attentions with a stony indifference, as if hardly conscious of her own existence, and quite unconscious of the world around her.

"It's like taking home a corpse," the nurse said to Arden, as they were nearing London.

He had prepared Mrs. Berry for the worst, but had added words of comfort and hope. Indeed, he could not resign himself to consider the case hopeless, in spite of the French physician's despondent views.

"She lives," he wrote, "and has a long life before her. You will need much patience, hopefulness, and love; and I know that all the rest of your life will be given to her as freely as you have given her your care and your love in the years that are gone. A mother's love can work a miracle sometimes; and I do not despair of seeing you both happy together in the days to come. All I would implore of you now is to be brave and hopeful."

This letter had had a good effect; and Mrs. Berry received

her daughter with a sublime gentleness and patience. She uttered no word of surprise or grief. She took Lisbeth to the little parlour where their two lives had moved along the years in placid monotony. She placed her in the armchair by the fireside, and with trembling hands arranged the cushion that supported her head and the light eider-down coverlet over her knees.

Lisbeth looked at the room with a kind of vacant wonder.

"Have I ever been here before?" she asked, speaking for the first time since they left Paris.

"Oh, dearest, dearest, it is your own parlour—with your piano, and your books, and all the things you love."

The girl's eyes turned slowly towards her mother. "I don't know who you are," she said.

"Oh, Mr. Arden, I didn't think it would be as bad as this. I thought she would know *me*, even if her mind was gone," said Mrs. Berry, in a low voice.

"My dear soul, you must have patience. Hope and pray."

"Pray! Ah, sir, you don't know how I have prayed for her since she was lost—the lost sheep—the lost sheep that is dearer than all the ninety and nine that have never gone astray."

VI.

ARDEN gave himself a night's rest in his comfortable rooms, among the books he loved, and in the peaceful atmosphere of familiar things, and went back to Paris next day. He had more than one reason for returning without loss of time. In a *New York Herald* which he had bought at the station when he was leaving Paris, he had seen an announcement that concerned him in the fashionable intelligence—

"Mr. and Lady Mary Selby are staying at the Hôtel Bristol after their winter at Cannes."

Before leaving Paris, Mr. Jackman had introduced Arden to a member of the police, a man of the highest grade, whose tact and experience would be equal to any difficulty. The detective had made this introduction at his client's earnest desire, but reluctantly.

"I hope you don't contemplate bringing Colonel Manville to book for his wickedness," Jackman said earnestly. "Take my word for it, sir, there's nothing to be done in that line; and in any encounter with him you'd get the worst of it. There's no net you can spread that's strong enough to hold a cloven hoof."

Arden had his views, but they were vague at present. In any encounter of that kind a man's acts are shaped by Fate, or Providence, or the chapter of accidents, whichever the man himself pleases to call the hand on the tiller. The man who calls it Fate is the most reckless; the man who calls it Providence is the strongest; the brainless man calls it accident.

He drove to the Bristol, and asked for Lady Mary Selby. Her ladyship had gone to Saint Germain for the day Had

she gone by rail? No; she had ordered a carriage and pair, and had left before luncheon.

He asked if Mr. Selby was in the hotel.

No. Mr. Selby had only stayed one night, and had left for London by the morning train.

Did Lady Mary intend to stay some time in Paris?

Her ladyship had engaged the rooms for a week.

It was mid-Lent; the boulevards were alive with a noisy exuberant crowd, pelting each other with showers of many-coloured paper disks, which covered all the women's gowns and the men's coats with rainbow spots. Paris had put on her holiday air, and there was to be a masked ball at the opera-house in the evening.

If Colonel Manville was still in Paris, it seemed to Arden that he would be likely to be found in a heterogeneous mob of that kind—cosmopolitan, disreputable; a vortex in which modern vice and modern virtue were whirled round, until distinctions vanished, and all seemed of one clay and one spirit. Avid of vicious pleasures, of the violent and eccentric, Manville would hardly miss a scene in which subterranean Paris came to the surface, respectable Paris only looking on, or at least declaring itself only a spectator.

Arden arrived on the scene early, while the trumpeters in the balcony were playing a noisy march from the comic opera which was at that time the delight of the Parisian playgoer. Though ordinary evening dress was worn by the majority at these balls, he had disguised himself in a monk's gown and hood of dark brown woollen stuff, with a rope girdle, a dingy attire in which face and figure were hidden, but which was too common a disguise to attract attention, as he moved quietly through the crowd slowly ascending that magnificent staircase which is the chief glory of the opera-house.

A brilliant spectacle flashed upon him as he arrived at the first circle. Stalls and stage had been converted into a level dancing-floor, and the whole interior had become one vast ballroom, where two bands, at opposite extremities of the circle, played alternately, strident, swinging waltz, or noisy polka, beating out their insistent rhythm, strings and brasses *fortissimo*, yet almost overpowered by the clamour

and roar of human voices, the loud bursts of laughter when in the flower-battle between the women in the boxes and the men in the *salle* a bunch of daffodils hit the mark with almost deadly effect, or a bouquet of violets flew over the heads of the crowd and nestled in the white plastron of a gaping dandy, or when a glittering toy, dangled from the upper circle by a string, tempted some agile youth to a prodigious leap, and was rapidly withdrawn as his hand clutched at it.

Ribbons of rainbow-hued paper were being hurled from every point of vantage; downward across the crowd, winding themselves about the swift-moving figures and clinging to bright hair and glittering garments; upward to the central chandelier, whence they streamed in gaudy showers, making bizarre effects in the whirl of colour and light. Among the cosmopolitan throng fancy dress was the exception; but the gay dresses and jewels of the women gave brightness and colour; and in a prominent part of the vast area a quadrille was being performed by a company from one of the boulevard theatres, whose elaborate costumes made a glowing point of intenser light where all was garish and brilliant.

Arden had been a gloomy observer of this vivid scene for almost an hour, when he discovered his sister in a box on the grand tier, with two other women, handsome and fashionably dressed. There were three or four men crowding the back of the box—all in evening dress—but Manville was not among them.

The night wore on. The hurly-burly might have amused and interested a man whose thoughts were free; and such an observer might have discovered much that was innocent and gay and good-humoured in the mixed assembly; but to Arden's troubled mind it seemed a page out of the book of hell. Those painted faces and half-naked forms, those haggard eyes ringed with black, and hollow bismuth-coated cheeks that had once been rosy with the bloom of girlhood; those men with the last word of profligacy stamped across the premature wrinkles on their mindless foreheads; those old women, who should have been rocking a grandchild's cradle, or kneeling in the gloom and silence of a chapel, before the altar of our Lady of Sorrows, but who flaunted their corpulent shoulders, glittering with sham diamonds,

gems as false as the frizzled auburn hair that crowned the withered brow.

He felt that he wanted to cry out to them to put on their masks, to hide the hideousness of vicious youth and impenitent age, out of charity to the spectators. Face after face—face after face—and in all the eyes the same unholy light; and on all the lips the same disgust of life, that tried to hide itself under the comedian's artificial smile. Even in the countenances of the superior people—the people who were there to look on, and who owned no affinity with the dancing, shouting, laughing, singing, grimacing mob—even in those complacent countenances of the rich and favoured of Fate, he saw that lurking disgust of life, disappointment, satiety.

Suddenly, through the throbbing crowd, there came a figure of monstrous bulk, that made a lane for itself as it advanced, cleaving the human mass, like a strong swimmer piercing a mountainous wave. A roar of applause and a chorus of laughter welcomed the creature's appearance. It was a huge brown bear, an admirable disguise, so perfect as to send a thrill of fear through some who stood within the monster's reach. He was a pacific brute, however, for a woman walked at his side, with her arm tucked under his huge paw. He walked erect, turning his huge head from side to side, surveying the crowd. Across the long fur upon his mighty breast he wore the ribbon and star of a Russian order.

The woman was a figure well known to the Paris of the Opera Ball. She was no longer young, and her face, which had once been perfect in its delicate aquiline, had hardened to the lines of a bird of prey ; but the eyes were still fine, and the figure, the carriage of head and shoulders, the sweeping line of shoulder and arm, the supple curve of the waist and long slope of the hip, were perfect. Sculptors had modelled that superb form; and the creature lived in bronze and marble in more than one world-famous statue.

The splendour of her dress was in the spirit of the place, and Arden had seen no costume as striking in all the kaleidoscope of vivid colour and eccentric form.

The gown was of some soft silken fabric, covered with crimson spangles, so closely that as the woman came slowly through the glancing lights it seemed as if she were clad in

flame. She wore a high tiara of diamonds on her blue-black hair. Of all the faces Arden had remarked hers owed the least to art. The complexion was like Parian marble, without a touch of carnation. Even the lips were pale.

"La Poulpe is in full force to-night," said a man standing near Arden. "Are those the diamonds the Portuguese Jew gave her?"

"Who knows? She has eaten princes as well as Jews—and American millionaires—and Greek financiers. She is the bottomless pit to which men's fortunes and lives go down."

"She can't go on for ever. She must be on the edge of forty."

"She will go on for the next twenty years. She will frighten men out of their money when she can no longer charm them. She has never painted her face yet—or dyed her hair. When she takes to those arts, it will be a renewal of youth—her second reign."

It hardly needed this dialogue to assure Arden that the man disguised as a bear was the man he had come to look for. The exceptional height and the Russian order had identified the masquerader. Arden contrived to follow within a few paces of the bear and his companion as they walked round the *salle*, stared at by everybody, eagerly observed by the people in the boxes, and often greeted with a burst of applause—"*Ohé, l'ours! bravo l'ours!*"

Near the entrance the bear bent his mighty head, and whispered in his companion's ear. She frowned as she answered him, and withdrew her arm with an offended look. Arden drew near enough to hear her reply.

"You won't get as good a supper anywhere else," she said. "Don José has lent me his *chef*, and the wine is from his own cellar—wine to swim in—wine to throw out of all the windows. You had better come to our supper."

"Not possible, *chèrie*. I have a particular engagement elsewhere—business—an affair of *la Bourse*."

"*Quel farceur!* Dost thou believe I am the woman to swallow that old story? La Bourse at two o'clock in the morning, when no man's brain is clear enough to correct an *addition chez Bignon?*"

They went out into the hall together, and Arden, following, saw the masquerader put the lady into a carriage, and then step into a cab and drive away.

Had he left for the night? Arden was of opinion that he would come back; and that Lady Mary would count for something in his movements. He had failed to save Lisbeth Berry; but he meant to save his sister, if she were not past saving. Where had she been all that day? Why drive alone to Saint Germain? His mind was full of dark suspicions. That she should be within reach of Manville was horror to him; and he foresaw the difficulty of dealing with a woman of her kind, his senior by seven years, and a woman of determined character, who had chosen her path in life—the flowerless path with an unloved husband, the path paved with gold, where there were no roses, no turtle-doves, no fond, foolish dreams, only diamonds and blood-horses, and *carte-blanche* with fashionable dressmakers. Mr. Selby's chief merit was boundless generosity, associated with an unlimited power of writing cheques. There are no disappointments in such a union, till the balance at the bank runs dry. There is no cloud of fear in such a life, except the fear of a financial crash.

Arden left his monkish robe and rope-girdle with one of the women in charge of coats and hats, and presented himself at the door of Lady Mary's box, an unconspicuous figure in evening dress. The door was opened by an old acquaintance, Major Vivian, a man who had seen hard service in Ashantee and India, and in another of his sister's party he discovered De Courcy Smythe, the man who had given him the utmost information he had ever been able to obtain about Konstantin Manville.

Lady Mary received her brother with more surprise than pleasure.

"You most un-Parisian person!" she exclaimed. "Who would ever have expected to see you at the Mi-Carême ball?"

"It is always the unexpected that happens," answered Arden, slipping into a chair behind hers. "I am in Paris upon very painful business. I want to tell you all about it when I can have an hour's quiet talk with you."

"I think we must postpone the quiet hour to some

afternoon next week in Grosvenor Square. I have only five days more in Paris, and every moment is engaged in advance. Allow me to present my brother, madame. Mr. Arden, la Baronne de Montvalliers," added Lady Mary, turning to the lady sitting next her, a handsome and imperious brunette, who was at this moment occupied in dangling a golden carp, with ruby eyes, over the heads of the crowd, lowering the toy, and pulling it up again as eager hands snatched at it, and laughing immoderately at every failure.

"My business is too serious to wait for Grosvenor Square," Arden told his sister, *sotto voce*.

"I am sorry for that; but since it is your business and cannot possibly concern me, it will have to wait till I am in London and at leisure. I am staying here to buy clothes for the season, and Parisian dressmakers are very troublesome and very exacting."

"The business concerns you more nearly than it does me."

Lady Mary looked at him curiously, and an angry light came into her eyes.

"Is it about some girl you were talking of in Grosvenor Square—boring yourself and me?"

"It is about that girl."

"Then I will hear nothing either in Paris or London. You have no right to bring me such stories."

"You must hear, and with the least possible delay. I shall call at the Bristol early to-morrow, and you must not deny yourself to me."

"Baronne, you are *impayable*," exclaimed Lady Mary, as Madame Montvalliers leant out of the box, laughing at the frantic efforts of an elderly reveller, leaping up to the golden carp, and always missing it.

"*Est-il assez horripilant, cet animal, hein?*" exclaimed la Baronne.

"Remember," said Arden, in the same low voice, as he rose to go, "I must see you. Adieu, Madame la Baronne. I hope you will not have that ambitious gentleman's death on your conscience."

"*Sale bête!* He kills himself in the effort to appear young," said the Baronne.

She drew up the glittering toy, and began to pelt distant acquaintances with little bunches of Parma violets from a basket at her feet.

Arden resumed his monk's robe and girdle on his way back to the ballroom. His interest in the scene was undiminished so long as his sister was in the opera-house. He had a suspicion that Manville would reappear.

He moved quietly about among the crowd, masked and hooded, a sombre brown figure, keeping watch upon Lady Mary's box, where he presently saw the Baronne and the other visitors taking leave. For about a quarter of an hour his sister remained alone, no longer an amused spectator, but sitting in the shadow. He noticed that she had put on her little velvet mask.

Then the door opened, and a tall figure appeared in the background—the unmistakable figure that he had watched at the Criterion Theatre—Colonel Manville, now in evening dress, correct, rigid, the man of the world, the citizen of all cities, always master of the situation. Lady Mary rose and took his arm, and they left the box together.

Arden was in the crowd at the foot of the staircase as they came down, Lady Mary still masked, and with a sable cloak over her velvet gown, the high collar covering the lower part of her face and head. Arden followed as they crossed the vestibule and went out into the open square, where the air had the chill feeling of early morning, though it was not yet three o'clock, and where the scavengers were sweeping up the many-coloured confetti that had fallen thick as snow.

Manville made no attempt to find Lady Mary's carriage, as Arden had expected. They crossed the road on foot, arm in arm, in the mock moonlight of arc lamps; and he followed them to the Avenue de l'Opera, where they went into the Café de Paris. He saw them pass through the miscellaneous crowd at the tables, opera-bouffe actresses, Americans, English, Spaniards, Italians, Hebrews, the sweepings of the great world of ill-gotten gold. They passed and vanished.

He beckoned to a waiter, holding a twenty-franc piece between the fingers that beckoned, being assured that in that scene of expensive riot, where the attendants were

rushing about as if distraught, nothing less than the glint of gold would attract attention.

"A tall man came in just now with a lady in a sable cloak," he said, holding the coin ready to drop into the man's hand. "Can you show me the room where they are to sup?"

"Not if monsieur wishes to make a scene. The proprietor objects to scenes," replied the man, with his eyes upon the gold.

"I shall not make a scene in the presence of a lady."

"*Bien!* Then I will show monsieur the *cabinet particulier*. The first service is just going up."

He held out his hand to receive the coin, and was not disappointed.

Arden followed him to the landing on the first floor, and stood outside the door of the room, while the dishes were being carried in. He waited there till he heard Colonel Manville dismiss the attendants.

"That is enough. You can go till I ring for the next course."

The two waiters came out, glanced at the brown monk, and went downstairs.

Two minutes afterwards Arden opened the door quickly, and stood upon the threshold of the gaudy little room, glowing with crimson and gold, the electric light tempered by rose-coloured shades.

Manville started to his feet indignantly, looking thunder on the intruder.

"Who is this *saltimbanque?*" he exclaimed furiously. "How dare you burst into a private room? Clear out this instant, fellow!"

"Not without Lady Mary Selby."

"Walter, this is too absurd," exclaimed Mary, who knew the voice under the monk's hood. "I don't know which is most ridiculous, your costume or your conduct."

Arden removed his mask, and threw off his hood and gown.

"My costume need not offend you. I have no desire to hide my identity from Colonel Manville. He is welcome to know me as well as I know him; but while I live to prevent it, my sister shall never again take his arm or sit in his company."

"I did not know you had a lunatic brother, Mary," said Manville, in a loud aside; and then turning to Arden, "My respect for Lady Mary Selby prevents my kicking you out of the room, Mr. Arden; but I hope you will remember that the restraint of a lady's presence has its limits, and relieve us from your company."

The strong dark face was livid with rage, but the man held himself in check.

Arden ignored him, and kept his eyes upon his sister, who sat fanning herself, with a hand that trembled violently, and trying to look unconcerned.

"Are you coming, Mary?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Do you suppose I am going to be carried off to please you, when I am absolutely famishing, and jumped at Colonel Manville's offer of supper? Do you suppose I shall submit to be dictated to by a younger brother, scolded as if I were a naughty child? If you are such a Philistine as to see any harm in my supping *tête-à-tête* with a friend, I can only say you are a quarter of a century behind your age."

Manville stood like a stone figure, watching and listening.

"I am not here to discuss social ethics, Mary," said Arden, quietly. "If your host were any one else, I should be the last to interfere; but you shall not break bread with a seducer and a murderer, if I can help it. Yes, a murderer"—answering Manville's look with eyes that flamed; "for to steal an innocent girl from her home, and to destroy her mind and soul—to drive her to attempt suicide—to reduce reason to imbecility, and doom her to a miserable future, is the worst kind of murder; and that is Colonel Manville's last crime; and that is why I will not suffer my sister to breathe the air he breathes, while I live."

"Manville, is it true?" cried Lady Mary, who had risen, in a tumult of agitation, and stood looking distractedly from the accuser to the accused.

"True! Don't you see that the man is raving?" exclaimed Manville, contemptuously.

"No, no! He never told me a lie. It is true. I believe every word. Give me my cloak, Walter. There"—pointing to the chair where her priceless sables had been thrown. "Yes, I will go with you"—as Arden wrapped the heavy

cloak about her—"this instant. I will never see him again—never. This is not the first warning. Other people have told me what he is. Thank God, it is not too late—not too late—to laugh at my folly."

"I think all the world is mad to-night," said Manville, contemptuously. "I cannot dispute with a lady's right to go or come as caprice dictates; but remember, Lady Mary, if you leave the room with the man who has grossly insulted me, you and I must be strangers till the end of our lives. No after-regret, no change of feeling on your part, will ever bring me back to you."

She had taken her brother's arm, and was moving towards the door. She turned and looked at Manville with a strange expression, in which fear predominated.

He followed them to the threshold.

"A word with you, Mr. Arden," he said, in a low voice, grasping Arden's arm in a grip of iron, as he drew him away from Lady Mary.

It was the first and the only time Manville touched him; and he never forgot that iron hand. Was it ice or fire that ran through his veins under that pressure? Was it a sense of burning or of weight? He was never able to define the sensation; but the memory of it remained.

"I suppose you know what this kind of insult involves in any country but your own?" whispered Manville.

"I am at your disposition, sir. Your friends will find me at the Hôtel Loyola, on the *rive gauche*."

"My friend shall call at your hotel in the afternoon, by which time you may have provided yourself with a second. No need for two. We can fight in the English fashion."

"As you please."

Arden passed him, and took his sister down the staircase and out into the avenue, where he found a disengaged fly among the crowd of carriages waiting for late revellers.

"What is this ghastly story, Walter?" Lady Mary asked, in a piteous voice. "Is Manville the unspeakable villain you make him?"

"Yes, he is an unspeakable villain."

"I have been a fool in encouraging his attentions. He is clever and amusing—an eccentric—altogether different from

the crowd of men my husband brings round me, who are all boring, and all alike; and I have allowed myself to be interested in him, perhaps a little more than I ought to be. But life is so empty."

"So empty! Poor Mary!" thought Arden, remembering Lady Maud Elderton, that other sister of his, in her rural rectory, for whom life was so full—full of simple things, of children, and children's clothes, and children's pleasures, and childish illnesses; of ponies and poultry, and husband, and sermons, and parish work.

"I should not have believed you, if I had not seen the truth in his face," said Lady Mary; "that cruel face, the eyes so brilliant and so hard, the sardonic lines of the iron lips. I used to admire him because he was so strong, like a tower, so strange, so terrible even; but to-night I saw the horror of it all. He is strong only in wickedness."

"Thank God you are disillusioned."

"Yes. The glamour has gone. I saw him in that instant without his mask. But that wretched girl! She was under the spell. Tell me about her."

Arden told her Lisbeth's story, briefly, but suppressing nothing, the pursuit, the elopement, the pit of hell into which the wretched girl had been flung, her attempt to drown herself, and her loss of reason.

"If you could have seen the human wreck that I carried home to a broken-hearted mother, you would hate the man as I do," he said. "Remember, it was no common cruelty. If he had loved the girl—even with an evil love—if he had chosen her for the companion of his life—one might say it was a common story of sin. But for a caprice, for the whim of an hour, he has destroyed a human soul, killed a life that was fair and full of promise."

"Oh, it is loathsome! I knew men were cruel to women—cruel to women they pretend to love—but not so cruel as that; not destroying a helpless creature for the fancy of a moment. But he will try to take his revenge for to-night, Walter. Such a man will have no mercy. What were you and he whispering about as we went downstairs?"

"Nothing of any consequence."

"Oh, but it must have been of consequence—in such a moment. You are not going to fight a duel with him?"

"No, no. Here we are at the Bristol. Shall I see you to your rooms?"

"Don't trouble. My maid will be waiting for me, and I have a footman here. He will be sitting asleep in the hall, I dare say, poor wretch. Good night."

VII.

ARDEN called on Mr. de Courcy Smythe at the Continental, at eleven o'clock on the day after the Opera ball, and was fortunate enough to find that citizen of the world in the act of completing his toilet, in his comfortable apartment on the fourth floor, with a wide range of view over the Place de la Concorde, the Champs Elysées, the river, and the white façades and classic domes and pediments of official Paris on the farther shore—a dazzling picture in the clear light of a spring morning.

Smythe listened with a surprised interest when he heard that he was wanted as second in a duel; but when Arden told him the name of his antagonist, he dropped the coat he was in the act of putting on, and sat down in front of his friend.

"My dear Arden, I don't mind a duel, though it is deucedly un-English; but a duel with that satanic Russian! For God's sake let it go no further. The man would kill you."

"Fortune of war. I hope I shall kill him."

"You hope—you, Walter Arden, the student, the mildest of men, a Brahmin, by Jove—would step out of your way rather than tread upon a worm! You! You want a man's blood upon your head?"

"I want to kill that man. The world will be the better for his death."

"By Jupiter!"

Mr. Smythe could find no stronger expression of his astonishment. He put himself into his coat slowly, looking at his friend all the time.

"I say, Arden, this seems a beastly business! Is it anything you have got into your head about your—about——" hesitatingly.

"About my sister, Mary Selby? No; my quarrel with him has nothing to do with my sister, although I suppose people have talked about her notice of the man."

"People will talk, don't you know, Arden. Most of us are such duffers that if we didn't talk about our friends and relations and acquaintances, half the dinner-parties in London would be dumb-show. We must talk about something. Manville has hung about Lady Mary; and you see the cleverest woman seldom knows bad style from good in the other sex. Ask her to vet another woman, and she'll know in a minute if there's a screw loose; but if a man is handsome, well-dressed, and a good talker, she may know him for twenty years without finding out that he isn't a gentleman. However, I'm glad your quarrel isn't about Lady Mary."

"No, she is entirely unconcerned, though I want the man out of the way for her sake. I had better tell you my story; and then you'll know why I want to kill that man. I should never regret the deed. It would not be a murder, but an execution."

He told the history of Lisbeth Berry, exactly as he had told it to his sister.

"You are sure of your facts?"

"Quite sure. Most of them have come under my own observation; and the man who is my authority for the rest is to be relied upon. The victim is there, sitting by her mother's hearth, ruined, broken, without reason or memory."

"But this man will kill you. Think what the man is! A soldier, a Hercules, a crack shot, and an accomplished swordsman."

"I am not afraid of his sword. I would rather fight him with swords than pistols."

"You! Are you a swordsman?"

"Yes. I suppose you think because I am bookish I don't care for anything outside a library. I have always been fond of fencing, ever since Angelo taught us at Eton. I have kept up the practice in England and in Italy, and I am pretty good at it. I am not afraid to meet Colonel Manville, though his height and weight may tell against me, and though he may be a better swordsman."

"When am I to see his man?"

"This afternoon, at four o'clock, at my hotel, the Loyola——"

"*Connais pas*," said Smythe.

"Lunch with me at Durant's, and I'll drive you there afterwards."

"Never mind lunch," said Smythe; "come to Milvoie's Salle d'Armes with me, and just let me see your form. It'll seem a little less like a human sacrifice if I see you are a good man with the foils."

"There is nothing I should like better. Have you had your little breakfast?"

"Two hours ago—rolls, coffee, and a new-laid egg."

"Then you won't mind lunching late. We'll go to the *salle* at once. I'll take half an hour's practice with the professor with *épées de combat;* and we'll adjourn to Durant's for luncheon."

"Good," said Smythe.

They walked to the *salle*, which was in one of the new streets on the way to St. Lazare; and Smythe looked on at an encounter between his friend and the professional instructor, which convinced him of Arden's mastery of the sword.

"I call that an eye-opener," he said, when Arden came to him for a few minutes' rest. "I should never have suspected you of being such a ripper."

"Did you think I was a muff in everything?"

"No, no; of course not! Only, you see, when one knows that a man is a bookworm——"

"One supposes him an all-round incapable. Well, will you back me against Manville?"

"No, for there is always the question of weight and size. I would as soon back you against the Russian bear you say he represented last night. But if a duel is inevitable——"

"It is inevitable. If you won't act for me, I must find some one else."

"Then I'll see you through it."

Colonel Manville's friend, Monsieur Leclair, appeared at the hotel as the clock of St. Sulpice struck the hour. He was a Frenchman, small, sinister-looking, and elaborately polite. He spoke no English, but the cosmopolitan Smythe was as much at his ease in French, German, and Spanish, as

in his native tongue. They were closeted together in the reading-room, unoccupied at this hour, for about twenty minutes, during which time everything had been arranged.

"The meeting is for half-past six to-morrow morning," said Smythe, when he and Arden were alone. "The sun does not rise till a quarter to seven; but there will be plenty of light for us if the day is fine, and nobody will be about at that early hour. Manville's friend looked surprised when I agreed readily to a duel with swords. He supposed, as an Englishman, you would have preferred pistols. I detected a look of satisfaction in his Jesuitical countenance, as if he thought you were giving away your chances."

"Where are we to meet?"

"Ah, there's the rub! At Leclair's suggestion, I have agreed to an out-of-the-way spot, in a very queer neighbourhood, between Menilmontant and the Fortifications, where there is a stretch of waste ground, soon to be built over, but at present a desert. As the provocation came from you, they claim the right to choose the place of meeting, as well as of weapons. Leclair urged that anywhere in the Bois de Boulogne, or even at Vincennes, we were almost sure to be surprised. The men who go there to fight mostly want to be surprised. 'A solitary spot in an out-of-the-way quarter is the best, if your friend means business,' he said. I told him you did very much mean business. He further urged that, in the event of a fatal result, the survivor would get away easily from that side of Paris."

"Well, the place will do, I dare say; but how are we to find it? The district is a *terra incognita* to me."

"And I am not very familiar with it, old Parisian as I am; so I arranged that our carriage should follow Manville's. He will leave the Rue Royale at ten minutes to six, and we must be there, in our carriage, and on the look out for him. *They* will take no doctor—clearly under the impression that yours is the only life in danger; but I know a man whom I can trust, and I shall get him to go with us. He has walked the hospitals in London, and is here as a student; but he is clever, and will be equal to the occasion, whatever it may be."

"Good. So long as you are sure you can trust him with our plans."

"Quite sure. I shall ask him to dine with me, and I shall tell him nothing till we part company at eleven o'clock. He will be with us before six in the morning; so there would hardly be time for him to peach, even if he were that way inclined."

"You are a model of discretion."

"Take care to select the stiffest shirt-front you can find. A well-starched shirt has sometimes saved a man's life. What you have to think of next, is where you will go if Manville gets the worst of it. Remember, if you were arrested red-handed, it might mean two years' imprisonment, at the least; while if you get away quietly, I don't suppose the police would take the trouble to hunt you down. You had better drive to the nearest station on the Eastern line, and get yourself into the first train that will take you to Brussels. You must look up all particulars in the time-table, and be prepared with your plan of action. I'll see you through it; but you had better be ready to act on your own, if needs must."

"You are a good fellow, Smythe. I shall be prepared for a rapid journey."

"And, above all things, keep your brain cool. I'll get a landau and a pair of good horses from a livery-yard where I am known. It must be here to fetch you at half-past five, and you can pick up Dickson, the doctor, and me, at the Continental at a quarter to six."

Through the cold grey of a March morning, before the toilers of the city were moving in the long white streets—in an hour when Paris was like a vision-city rather than a vast hive of brick and stone, overcrowded with human beings—two carriages drove quickly along the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue Saint Antoine, that apparently interminable avenue of tall houses that passes through every shade of fashion, commerce, and poverty; to end at last in the open space where the gloomy towers of the State prison once rose in their dark strength above moat and drawbridge, where the old walled city of the Valois and the Bourbon ended, and the long country roads began.

The carriages, one following the other at about a hundred yards' distance, drove along the Boulevard Richard Lenoir

for some distance, and then through a labyrinth of narrow streets to the Boulevard de Belleville, and after crossing the Boulevard, to another labyrinth of narrower streets on the side of a hill. This shabby wilderness, where crime and penury had their habitations, was a Paris Arden had never seen—though the Faubourg St. Honoré and the Faubourg St. Germain, the Champs Elysées and the Bois, were as familiar to him as St. James's and Hyde Park.

They passed by the abodes of wretchedness—squalid hovels, shabby wine-shops, ill-paved streets—where a sprinkling of haggard women and brutal-looking men were on foot already in the pale grey morning; but where most of the windows were still shuttered and the doors closed.

The spot chosen by Manville was a waste space of about three acres at the back of a lane in which there were sheds, and stables, and gaunt buildings that looked like warehouses, but no human habitations. The place could scarcely have been better chosen. It was a district where the police were rarely seen; and where the wretched population looked upon deeds of violence as the commonplace of life.

There were the usual preliminaries: formal salutations exchanged between the combatants, swords measured, and lots drawn for choice of position.

The seconds chose a level spot near the middle of the ground, and placed their principals fronting each other in the clear cold light. Long streamers of pink and yellow showed faintly above the horizon, but there was no dazzle or glitter of sunshine.

Konstantin Manville stood up against the grey background, a magnificent figure; the breadth of chest and squareness of shoulder, the muscular development of the long straight limbs, indicating a surpassing strength, the tense form motionless as the statue of a Roman gladiator. Never had man faced a more formidable antagonist; and to meet such an antagonist in a first duel might have appalled a man even without stamping him as a weakling. De Courcy Smythe shivered as he noted the contrast between that prodigious form and Arden's slim frame, just under six feet; but Arden was unmoved by the peril of the encounter. A steady light shone in his dark grey eyes; his manner was composed; his movements were firm and

decisive. From the first dawn of this fatal day he had been assured of victory. A something in his mind which was not himself, but a power beyond and above himself, made him strong as iron.

For the first few thrusts and guards the men appeared equal in skill and rapidity. It seemed as if such an encounter might go on for an hour; a mere display of science, admirable, full of interest to the spectator. Then a dark change came over Manville's face, and his thrusts and lunges assumed a savage violence, as if, having found skill where he had expected to find incompetence, he had lost his self-command, and wanted to beat down his antagonist's guard by sheer force. The swords met, and clashed, and parried, and thrust, with lightning quickness. Arden seemed as if inspired, as if some supernatural power had given force and agility to that slender form, and were sustaining it against the weight and vigour of a Hercules.

Suddenly, with a furious impetus, Manville hurled himself upon his antagonist, trying to force his sword out of his grasp. The attack was so savage, so unscientific, such an exercise of sheer strength against skilled swordsmanship, that De Courcy cried shame, and even the Frenchman muttered a word of disapproval.

The frantic onslaught failed; Manville lost his footing, and stumbled forwards. Parry and thrust followed fast, in a *corps à corps* encounter—deadly, implacable as Fate, a struggle of moments; and then the massive form crumbled like a figure built of sand, and sank to the ground in a heap, the blood oozing slowly from a mortal wound.

The young doctor rushed to the fallen man with all his appliances ready, Leclair helping him to raise the huddled figure into an easier position.

Manville motioned them aside. "Don't pester me," he gasped, "you can do nothing for a dead man."

Then, with an effort, lifting a hand that shook like a leaf, he beckoned Arden to his side, waving back the other two men.

"Kneel down. Closer—closer." And as Arden obeyed, he hissed in his ear, "I want to give you my legacy of hate —a dying man's promise. Don't think you have done with me. You have killed this carcass, this thing of flesh and

bone; but you have not killed *me*. The fire that burns here is not at your mercy. It lives; it has lived in centuries past; and shall live through the coming years, to be your torment and your curse. When you are luckiest, when you are happiest, when woman's love is sweet and life is fair, I shall be near you. There is no path you tread where I may not cross your steps; there is no hour you live that shall be safe from me. Fool! Do you think this blood that stains the dust will end a mind and a force like mine? Such spirits pass; they change; they do not die."

His last breath expired with the last word, panted out in a hoarse whisper. His head fell back on Leclair's knee, the wide eyes staring wildly, fixed in unutterable hate.

VIII.

Walter Arden, Via di Babuino, Rome, to Douglas Campbell, The Hut, Leith, Tasmania.

I HAVE let nearly a year and a half drift by, my dear old friend, without writing to you, although you have been in my mind very often during that time, and I have suffered and experienced much that I wanted to confide to the one man upon this earth from whom I am sure of sympathy in circumstances that might provoke ridicule from most people.

A year ago I was involved in a tragedy, which ended with the death of a most consummate villain, whose existence upon this earth had been a bane and a curse to helpless innocence. I gave you a detailed description of this man in my last letter, and of the unhappy girl who was then hovering on the brink of ruin, powerless as a bird that flutters spellbound by the baleful gaze of a snake. Her fate was swift and cruel. I took her back to her broken-hearted mother, with ruined health and a shattered mind, and her life since then has been a living death.

I will not give you the history of the seducer's end. It was sudden and violent, and in somewise mysterious, since the hand that killed him has never been discovered. It was in Paris that he met his death; but whether he fell in a duel, or was murdered in cold blood, is still an open question for the Parisian police; though the fact that he was found lying in an out-of-the-way spot, clad only in trousers and shirt, stabbed through the body, points to the former view. He had lived only to do evil, and there was no one to be sorry for his death; for I am told that his father, who survives him, has long ceased to interest himself in anything except

the prolongation of his own life, now verging on the century.

I remained in my old lodgings in Jermyn Street for some months after Lisbeth Berry's return to her mother's hearth; and I was able to help the poor mother by taking her daughter to three celebrated mental specialists; but from none of them could we obtain a hopeful opinion. The girl's condition was pronounced harmless, not far removed from imbecility, and the chances of recovery were poor. Yet recovery was said to be not impossible; and in the mean time she might safely live with her mother, with such care and supervision as the mother could give. There was nothing in the case to call for restraint or isolation. This was the only ray of comfort; and the boundless love of the mother finds a kind of happiness in the companionship of this blighted girl, and in toiling for her, and ministering to her.

And now I come to my own state of mind, which I have communicated to no living creature; since were I to confide in an ordinary acquaintance, he would only laugh at me, and were I to describe my condition to a doctor, he might write me down a lunatic.

For the last year, almost perpetually, I have been tormented by the sense of an unseen presence, a creature of evil, hovering near me, impalpable, invisible, unthinkable almost, for I can imagine neither form nor nature; and it is only by my own intense depression and vague horror that I conclude the presence to be evil. From the beginning of things I have struggled against the feeling. I have gone more into society, spent more hours in the easy-going and varied company at my club; but even there, in those most unromantic surroundings, in the billiard-room, in the card-room, among men of the world, that haunting presence has still been with me; and in the midst of a rubber of bridge, in the excitement of a hundred-break at billiards, or the rowdy racket of snooker, that ghastly sense of the something evil close at my side, the something of another world overshadowing me, has made ease of mind impossible. Before I left London, my club-friends were telling me that I was looking very ill, that I had altered greatly in a very short time; and every one of the friendly souls was urgent with me to get myself overhauled by his

favourite physician. I had doctors' names and addresses pressed upon me. I was made to feel that I was a desperate case.

You know my old aversion to evening parties, from the days of our Oxford perpendiculars. Well, to elude this spectral company, I accepted every invitation that was sent me, and came to be known as a young man who was worth the trouble of a card, since he was almost sure to put in an appearance. The mystic words "at home" commanded my presence. I danced, I flirted, I listened to all the musical stars of the season. I saw all the plays, I heard all the operas. I was at Ascot, Sandown, even Newmarket. But go where I would, on the racecourse or on the river, in ball-room or concert-room, I carried that evil presence with me, until the haunted look in my face began to be noticeable even by frivolous beauty, and my partners, while approving my waltzing, began to tell me that I was looking dread-fully ill.

After that, I felt I was no longer fit for scenes of gaiety; so I left England before the end of the London season, and have been a wanderer in Switzerland and Italy ever since, rarely spending more than twenty-four hours in any spot, however it took hold of my heart and mind. In bitter truth I have been driven from place to place, a haunted man, trying, in daily change of scene, and in almost perpetual movement, to shake off that miserable sense of a presence other than my own, a presence that makes for evil.

One curious evidence of the something unknown and unexplainable has been a source of keen pain to me. I think you will remember my love of dogs, and how at Oxford I was seldom unaccompanied by my adored and adoring Splinter, a fox-terrier of undoubted race, offspring of a mother whose career was a brilliant succession of triumphs at Islington, Birmingham, and the Crystal Palace. When I established my quarters in Jermyn Street, I sent Splinter, then four years old, to Wildernsea, my brother's place in Hertfordshire, in charge of an old gamekeeper whom I had known from childhood, and to whom I was not afraid to confide that precious existence.

In the beginning of that haunted feeling which has made my life a burden, sitting after midnight surrounded by the

books I love, in that quiet hour which was once the choicest portion of my day, I found myself longing for the vivacious companionship and frivolous distractions which my terrier had afforded me in the old college-rooms, when I was reading hard for my degree. I thought that Splinter's society would exorcise my demon, which I then believed to be only a mood, an unexplainable condition of nerves.

I ran down to Hertfordshire one fine May morning, spent a few hours with my brother and his belongings, looked round the old house and gardens, and brought Splinter back to London with me.

I had never lost touch with my favourite; for though Wildernsea and I have little in common except our race, we have always been on friendly terms, and I have spent two or three days at the old home every autumn, annually invited for one of his big shoots.

My dog welcomed me rapturously; and old Bowker, his custodian, assured me that at ten years old he was just as playful, mischievous and active as in his puppyhood, a fine ratter, and a "mark on cats." I was delighted to have him again, and having squared the guard, established myself with my lively friend in the assured privacy of a first-class compartment labelled "Engaged."

We had not been together half an hour before I detected a change in my dog. He fidgeted about the carriage, not with the joyous restlessness of old, but with the air of being pursued by something that he feared. Splinter, who knew not fear! He scratched the doors vehemently, rushing from one to the other, and looked at me with a piteous appeal in his expressive eyes; he put his paws upon my knee, looking up at me with dumb pleading; and finally, as if distressed at my not understanding him, set up a mournful minor howl, which made my blood run cold. Never before that evening had I heard such a sound from Splinter.

I kept him in Jermyn Street for a week; a week of distress for him, and of mental agony for me. He escaped from my room at every opportunity; for I was cruel enough to insist on having him with me whenever I could. He crept down to the basement, where he seemed perfectly happy, my servant told me, where he ate, drank, and took his ease. I tried to keep him in my room at night, recalling

our habits in college, when Splinter slept on my bed, and aroused me from slumber in the early morning, licking my face in a transport of affection, as if to welcome me back to the waking world. With such an early-rising companion, one could hardly miss chapel.

But that one night in Jermyn Street was enough. The dog lay with his nose against the door, making a low whimpering noise, like the subdued crying of a frightened child. After that night I let him sleep in my man's room, who assured me that never dog was a quieter or more endearing companion.

At the end of this troubled week I took my terrier back to Wildernsea ; but I allowed him to make the return journey in the guard's van, where he made himself at home, and gave satisfaction. I told my old friend Bowker that Splinter did not like London ; and this was my only explanation of his prompt return.

Undeterred by this painful experience, which I tried to account for as a purely material phenomenon, my own shattered nerves acting on the nervous system of a thoroughbred dog, I looked for a canine companion elsewhere. I bought a bulldog, of renowned breed and undoubted courage ; but only to see my experience with Splinter repeated in almost every detail. The bull was happy in the kitchen, or with my servant. He was miserable with me.

I tried a Schipperke, a pert, irresistible little black beast, with alert ears and no tail, all vivacity and intelligence ; but in my company he became paralyzed by fear. I tried a powerful Irish terrier, hardly past puppyhood, full of fight and high spirits ; but he had not been with me an hour before he exhibited the same signs of terror that I had seen in the others. This was my final experiment. I sold my dogs, at a considerable loss, to the man who supplied them, and who evidently looked upon me as an eccentric, unworthy of four-legged friendship.

I cannot tell you how keenly I suffered from this failure, so humiliating to a dog-lover. It was the last straw ; and from that time I have been a miserable man. If the horror is in myself, in my own shattered nerves and disordered mind, which by some subtle power communicates itself to the brute creation, the idea is scarcely less appalling than

that other idea of an extraneous presence, an evil spirit from which my life is inseparable.

In my Italian rambles I often tried to make friends with dogs—a peasant's dog barking in front of a cottage, a casual cur loitering on the road, sheep-dogs, waggoners' dogs—but not one among them ever reciprocated my caresses. Every dumb creature that I courted slunk away from me with a suspicious and distressed air. I have seen the same kind of recoil in wayside children I have talked to, but never to the same extent. Is there a keener instinct in dogs that makes them suffer in any contact with evil; and if so, what is this mysterious intangible evil that I carry about with me?

I am now in this delectable city, the meeting-ground of all the ages, where hitherto I have always found my life full of keen interests and varied pleasures; and I hope to remain here till May, when I shall go back to London, and try to resume my old habits among my books in Jermyn Street, where my rooms are undisturbed, waiting for their master. I am weary of my nomad existence, and of fatigue which has never brought untroubled sleep or hopeful dreams.

I know not if even you, with your wide belief in the Unseen, will have found patience to finish this letter; but if you are able to give any serious thought to the mental trouble which has been heavy upon me for nearly a year, I shall be deeply grateful for any ray of light which you, as an expert in the unconditioned, can throw upon my perplexities.

Yours always,

WALTER ARDEN.

The Hut, near Leith, N.W. Coast, Tasmania.

MY DEAR WALTER,

You must have lost all memory of the hours we spent together if you could think that it was in me to make mock of any strange mental experience in the life of a friend. So soon as I was able to think, it was borne in upon me that I was living in a cloud of mystery, that all about and around me were influences of which I knew nothing, and could never know much, so long as I wore this vesture of clay. So soon as I was able to reason, I told myself that the finite could never comprehend the infinite, and that the spiritual world

must ever remain beyond the fathom-line of human thought. Something we think we know, something we guess. Imagination soars where reason cannot reach; and some of us retain in older years much of the child's unquestioning belief in the things he cannot see or understand—the unmapped Heaven, the life beyond the grave, the continued existence of those we have known and loved here.

For my own part, every year that I have spent on earth seems to have brought me nearer to the things that are not of earth. The unseen, the unconditioned, has taken a stronger hold upon my mind; and every blow that fate has struck at my heart here, every friend whom death has beckoned to the farther shore, has made me more convinced of the spiritual life that wraps us round amidst the dull commonplace of our everyday existence.

And in this spirit-world, in the ten thousand times ten thousand of those who have lived and sinned and suffered and died, who live and move around us as we journey through life, I cannot doubt that the imperishable evil moves side by side with the imperishable good. I do not question that the indestructible mind, the something which is not bone and flesh, the intangible essence that no Darwin has been able to fix, for which no science has found a cause or a limit, survives the earthly frame of the sinner as surely as it survives the earthly frame of the saint, and that the unseen world is peopled with devils as well as with angels, while the struggle between good and evil, the contest between Michael and Lucifer, is for ever going on. I am ready, therefore, to believe that your life has of late been darkened by a baneful presence, unseen, but always near you; a disembodied spirit of hate and revenge, a hideous companion, whose deadly influence the finer instinct of the brute creation can perceive, though human intelligence outside your own mind is seldom conscious of it.

I read between the lines of your letter, and divine those particulars of Manville's fate, which you might not care to trust to the hazards of the ocean post. But I am assured that whatever were the circumstances of his death, your part in the tragedy was honourable, and that you have no occasion for remorse. But, materialist though you are, can you think that the strong, wicked soul, the insatiable

spirit of sin, the mind so active, so powerful for evil, could be sent to an eternal sleep, annihilated by a thrust from a small sword? No, Walter, the soul of life is a light and a fire that no earthly accident can extinguish. Do you think the great Plantagenet, Edward I., is dead, or Luther, or Bonaparte, or Shakespeare; or the wicked ones of the earth, the Borgias, the guilty queens, Joanna of Naples, Catherine of Russia; the restless, daring, unscrupulous, pitiless souls? Do you think that any of these have ended with the clay that held them? In some form of flesh or spirit, visible or invisible, they are with us still, immortal minds, working amidst us for good or evil.

But if the wicked influences are strong, I believe the good influences are stronger, and that the archangel is continually prevailing against the archfiend. I believe that your release from the cloud that overshadows you will come sooner or later from some pure and holy spirit among the dead or the living, whose bright, white light of innocence and piety will overpower the evil thing that haunts you. Pray for the advent of that fair soul, that pure light of truth, a divine emanation from the Divine Infinite. The lives of many men have been made blessed by the presence of an angel clad in human form. Lift up your soul in prayer. Forget that you ever questioned the existence of an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient God; and submit yourself in all humility to the only power that can prevail against the dominion of sin.

I shall pray for you, my dear friend, with all the fervour of which I am capable; and be sure that whatever you may now suffer from an inextinguishable malevolence, you will be rewarded here or hereafter for your generous and humane endeavour to save that unhappy girl. When I think of the men who go through the world, enjoying all that this earth can yield of pleasure and self-indulgence, and never lifting a finger in behalf of a fellow-creature, I must needs admire the chivalry that has cost you so dear.

Write to me whenever you are so minded, and remember that my interest in your spiritual experience is inexhaustible.

Your sincere friend,

DOUGLAS CAMPBELL.

Arden had counted upon remaining in Rome till the hot weather drove him away from a city which he loved better than any other spot on earth; but before the end of April he was on his way to London, travelling straight through by the Rome express, restless, anxious, eager to be back in his old rooms, in the noisy multitudinous city, in the press and ferment of a world where the struggle for life, the race for wealth, the greed of power, keep the great machine always going, the piston-rods always plunging to and fro, the wheels always revolving at their maximum speed.

Rome, and all the poetry of past ages, all the beauty of temple and fountains, of mountain and sky, all the picturesque charm of City and Campagna, had failed to rid him of his incubus, of that unexplainable, indefinable sense of a malignant presence that had become almost a part of his consciousness, since not for one peaceful hour was he able wholly to forget that the thing was there. He might half forget, perhaps, in the distraction of brilliant society, where the touch-and-go conversation flew lightly from theme to theme, and every happy turn in the sparkling talk provoked a happier retort, till the air seemed alive with electric flashes of wit and fancy; but no sooner was he again alone than the silent horror returned.

He found himself a welcome guest in art circles, literary circles, and diplomatic circles. All the sets and cliques were open to a young unmarried Englishman of good family, with fine manners, and credited with ample means. He considerably increased the number of his acquaintance during the month that he spent in the city of the Seven Hills; and he made one friend, an Anglo-American, a young Englishman of good birth, who had led a roughish life on the "other side," plucky, shrewd, adventurous, and supremely unconventional, the son of a High Church dean, brought up in the odour of sanctity, educated at Winchester and Oxford, and flung loose upon the world at two-and-twenty, cast off by an indignant father, upon his refusal to take orders, and his open confession of a careless, easy-going agnosticism.

So, repudiated by the outraged dean, and wept over by his mother and sisters, Archer Stormont had contrived to escape starvation, and even to keep a decent coat upon his back, a roughish coat, perhaps, coarse tweed or homely frieze, not

fashioned by a West End tailor. He had contrived to live honestly, to hold his head high, breaking horses on a Texas farm, or driving a tram in New York, teaching Boston girls to ride, or acting in a dime theatre; and he had seen more of the varieties of life, of strange men and strange manners, than the pampered traveller in the *train de luxe* and the state-cabin has ever seen, in his expensive progress from city to city and continent to continent.

It is not in the saloons of Brobdingnagian steamers, not in the most modern and luxurious hotels, that those varieties of life are to be met with. Archer Stormont would have sickened amidst the white-and-gold panelling and ease and high living of a first-class passage on an American liner. He loved the rough better than the smooth.

The society of such a man was new to Arden, and as pleasant to him as a gust of fresh mountain air blowing the city vapours out of a tired brain. He and Stormont had been at Balliol together, but were not of the same year, and had seen very little of each other, Stormont living only for the cricket-field and the river, while Arden was then reading hard for his degree.

They became chums in Rome, went for long tramps on the Sacred Way, explored the Catacombs together, the only relics of the past in which Stormont took the faintest interest, dined at the Café de Rome together, and went together to theatre or music-hall.

Such a life was a tame and languid business for a man who loved the hazards and perils of a new country, outside the limits of civilization. Stormont had come to Rome with an American family, Mr. and Mrs. Washington Jamford, and their two daughters, people of vast wealth and some intelligence, to whom he had attached himself as a kind of house-steward, financial manager, and master of horse. In Rome, where the Chicago millionaire was a stranger, Stormont's services were invaluable. He had chosen their lodgings in a Prince's palace on the Corso; he engaged and bullied their servants, bought their horses and carriages, and obtained their introduction to society. He hunted with the sons, and cycled with the daughters; instructed the *chef*, and looked after the cellar. He was ubiquitous and unfailing.

"It gives me something to do," he told Arden, "and just saves me from blowing out my brains in this dull hole. They are an exacting family, but they mean well. The old chap is a gentleman, and the girls have only one fault—they are both in love with me."

"Why not take advantage of the situation, and make one of them happy? They are both pretty; but for choice I should say the younger sister, Vanessa."

"Marry! Shut up my life in the circle of a wedding-ring! Not much," said Stormont. "They've abolished slavery in the States, and I'm not going to be a feather-headed girl's white nigger."

The adventurer opened his mind to his friend in one of those long walks on the Campagna, far beyond the fortress tomb of Cecilia Metella, that noble monument of a wife's merits and a husband's love; or is that splendid sepulchre only the evidence of a wife's wealth, the memorial a contented widower paid for with the gold of the dead? Arden had often gazed at the sculptured wall, dreaming, as Byron dreamt, of her life-history, whose ashes were entombed there.

Loved or unloved, the world knows nothing of her. But Douglas Campbell would tell him she was living still, an imperishable essence, living in the flesh or in the spirit; near him, invisible, as he stood by her tomb; or in the City yonder, a creature of princely birth, born and reared in a palace; or a peasant sitting behind her flower-basket on the steep slope of the Pincian hill.

"I'm getting pretty sick of this kind of life," said Stormont, "but I'm going to take my friends back to Chicago early in May, and after that I shall be my own master. What do you think I'm going to do next?"

"Texas and wild horses again?"

"No. I'm going to Klondyke, to dig for gold. Will you come with me, Arden? You're looking ill and troubled. I believe you are quite as sick of this one-horse old town as I am. You are perishing for want of something to do—something to think about. Come to Klondyke——"

"Turn gold-finder—when I have more than enough for all my wants? Turn my back upon civilization—books—music—art—to perish in a polar desert?"

"Never mind the gold. It's not the filthy lucre that draws me. It's for the sake of something new, a strange world, a struggle for life. You don't know the keen delight of that kind of existence, where everything conventional, worn-out, stale, narrow, monotonous, the dull treadmill round that your civilized citizen calls life, is left behind, forgotten. You don't know what it is to find yourself in a place where everything is unexpected, and every hour brings new danger or new luck. I don't care a curse for the shekels, for what men call a comfortable income; but I wouldn't mind being a millionaire."

"Why, what would a nomad like you do with your million?"

"Carry it in my breast-pocket—liquid—loose—spend it, man, spend it! Not on houses, and lands, and horses, and carriages, and diamonds, and French cooks; but on the whim of the moment, on the friend of a day, on the chorus-girl I sit next at supper, on the beggar who follows me along the street; scatter the paltry dross right and left with both hands, waste it, wallow in it, knowing that if I fling away my last sovereign I shall be able to earn bread and cheese when it is gone. But I don't go to Klondyke with any idea of a million. I go for the fun of the thing. Will you come?"

"I'll think about it, my dear fellow."

"Ah, that's your form. You have the look of a man who is always thinking about things, and never doing them. But I give you my honour, you want change and adventure much worse than I do. There's something on your mind—something wrong with you. I ask no man for his secrets, not even my friend."

"I have no secrets," Arden answered hastily.

"Haven't you? Then you've a deuced preoccupied air for a man who has no trouble on his mind."

"I did not say I had no trouble."

"Come to Klondyke; when you've been shovelling gravel or wheeling a heavy barrow all day, you'll sleep sound all night. Our nights will be short there, and sleep precious."

Arden liked Archer Stormont better than any friend he had except Douglas Campbell. The two men were wide

as the poles asunder in their mode of life and way of thinking; but in both there was the same element—absolute sincerity. Each was a tower of strength in friendship, for neither was capable of falsehood.

Arden was in the old rooms again, with the books which had been such dear companions in the untroubled past. He tried to take up old threads of favourite studies, tried to throw his thoughts backward into those historic ages which had once been a source of inexhaustible delight. But though the books were no less dear, the man was changed; though the past was no less vivid and real, the mind had lost its power of concentration. He found himself reading the same page over and over again, unable to fix his thoughts upon the text. That haunting presence, that something unknown and evil was with him in the quiet of his book-room, with him in that shadowy hour between day and night which he had loved of old, when the page grew dim and he closed his book, threw himself back in his armchair, and mused upon all he had read, while the fire-glow flickered on the wall, or the sunset crimsoned the room, and the street noises floated in at the open window. He had loved solitude once, but now he found it intolerable.

Invitations poured in upon him when it was known he was in London; and he accepted them eagerly. No society was too frivolous for him at this period of his life. He liked the artistic and literary society best—painters, actors, novelists, poets; for among these the talk was more startling and highly coloured, and made for self-forgetfulness. He complied with all the exactions of society women, fetched and carried for them, appeared at their afternoon teas, listened to their music, escorted them to the theatre, danced with them or sat out with them, talked chiffons or talked scandal, just as they pleased. Anything was better than solitude.

On his return to London, he met his sister Mary for the first time since she bade him good night in the vestibule at the Bristol. It was more than a year since he had seen her; and he found that she too had changed. She was as handsome as ever, but there were new lines in her face. Her eyes looked larger, and her mouth had a pensive look

in repose that was new. Her manners had the automatic vivacity of women who are outwardly gay because they are inwardly miserable.

"Where have you been hiding yourself all this time?" he asked.

"Hiding myself? Why, I have been flashing about the society sky like a comet. I was seedy last season, and the doctors sent me to Nauheim early in June. You must have heard of my Homburg picnics. They were prodigious successes. My husband had a grouse-moor, and I tore from the Taunus to the Pentlands. We had a glorious August and September; but I was seedy again in October, and I told the doctors to send me to Ceylon; and Ceylon was a failure. We stayed in Egypt from January to March, spent the Easter week at Monte Carlo, and came back to Grosvenor Square on the first of May. All which information you might have seen a hundred times repeated in the society papers."

"I never read society papers."

"And where have you been?"

"In London last season, in Italy ever since."

"Then Italy doesn't agree with you, for you are looking ten years older since—since——"

She left the sentence unfinished. A strange expression—distress, horror, he knew not which—came into her face, and she turned from him suddenly, and began talking to a man standing near. This conversation had been carried on in a mob, at a great reception, to which people came in their finest raiment, looked about, and not seeing the people they wanted to see, went away after ten minutes, "going on" to something smaller and pleasanter, something where there were corners adapted for talk or flirting, and a buffet that was not a feast of Tantalus, all the delicacies of the season blockaded by a greedy crowd.

Arden was greatly surprised when Lady Mary called upon him in Jermyn Street on the morning after this chance meeting.

It was only twelve o'clock, and she, who had all the fashionable carriages at her disposal, from barouche to ralli-cart, came to Mrs. Berry's house in a four-wheel cab.

She was more plainly dressed than he had ever seen her in town, in a dark tailor gown and a little cloth toque.

"I felt I must see you alone," she said abruptly, when the servant had shut the door. "And I am never alone in my own house between sunrise and midnight."

"I am very glad to see you, my dear Mary."

"Are you? Are we friends, or enemies? I never know which."

"Friends, I hope."

There was a brief silence; and then she looked at him suddenly with flaming eyes.

"You killed Konstantin Manville."

"Have you come here to tell me that?"

"I have come because I can't rest till I know the truth. I suspected you, that night, when you and he whispered together. I lay awake in an agony for hours, knowing that there was to be a duel. I thought he would kill you. I was wretched, accusing myself of being your murderer. I could not rest all the next day. I drove about Paris, calling upon people who knew him, thinking I should hear something; for I fancied the duel would be over next morning. I never thought of seconds and *pour-parlers*, or any cause for delay. I had every evening paper in Paris brought to my room that night, and, finding nothing, I began to hope that the thing had blown over. If I had known where you were staying, I should have gone to you——"

"To plead for the man you loved?"

"No. To implore you not to risk your own life. I thought he was invincible."

"He was not, you see. Even the wicked cannot have everything their own way—always."

"After three days of suspense—agonized suspense—I saw in the paper that he had been found dead, in a solitary quarter of Paris, and had been taken to the Morgue, and recognized almost immediately. Then came the inquiry—an everlasting business. Was it a murder, or a duel? There were two or three people arrested. I suppose you know that."

"Arrests that meant nothing, and lasted for twenty-four hours at longest."

"There was no evidence against anybody; and the police

decided that he had been killed in a duel. No one knew of any quarrel. The people at the café could have said something if they had chosen; but, luckily, they did not come forward. No one knew anything of his movements since he was seen in the opera-house with that vile woman—La Poulpe, the papers called her."

"Lucky for you that the last association observed was with that vile woman, and not with you."

"Yes. Richard would have been frantic if my name had been mixed up in such a business. You know what he is. I may spend his money with both hands, tear about the world as much as I like; but, in his opinion, Selby's wife is quite as important a person as Cæsar's wife. That was an escape. But Manville is gone, and the world seems empty without him."

"Mary, what madness!"

"Madness! Yes, I suppose it is madness. What was there in him? What was the charm that made all other men seem dull and commonplace, all other society boring, after an hour with him? Remember, I have nothing to be ashamed of in our relations; unless it is shameful to care more for one man's company—for the sound of his voice, for the touch of his hand—than for all the rest of the world. I am not ashamed of having loved him. I was under a spell, I think. I know that I have been miserable ever since. I have rushed about the world. I have lived in a crowd. But I cannot forget him; I cannot find peace. I feel sometimes as if he were still near me, still holding me enthralled with that strange power of his. Even in this room," she said, starting up from her chair suddenly, "I feel as if he were standing at my shoulder. I dare not look round for fear I should see him, ghastly, in his bloody shirt, as they found him in that horrid field behind Belleville. I drove there in a fly to look at the place. I was drawn there; and the picture of that dreary waste has haunted me ever since."

There was a silence. Arden had risen when she rose, and they stood staring at each other, pale to the lips.

"How white you look!" she said, after those moments of mute horror. "You killed him! I know you killed him!"

"You can know nothing more than the police know about his death. It is enough for you to know that he fell in fair fight. He did not deserve to live."

"Oh, I know that he was wicked—an evil spirit, with power not given to common humanity. Walter, you know what my married life has been, how straight, how clean, how free from the shadow of reproach, till I met that man. I lived among women whose lovers were as well known to the world as their liveries, women who had their open secrets, which all the world knew and pretended not to know. I visited and received women whose lives had been one long scandal; and I kept my own life honest."

"Yes, yes, I know, Mary. I thought badly of you when you made a mercenary marriage; but I respected you afterwards, because you were a good wife."

"I was a good wife till I met that man. I was not always happy. There were intervals of depression when I felt that I had missed something—the romance, the glamour, the poetry of life. I had fits of melancholy during which it was a struggle to seem satisfied with the things that money can buy. It was in one of my melancholy fits that I met Colonel Manville. I was in the Pyrenees, for a cure, alone. We saw each other every day. We walked in the pine-woods in the sultry silence, in a world that seemed new to me from the hour I met him. And then for the first time I understood what glamour meant, the glamour women had talked about, those women who cannot keep themselves from talking about their infatuations. Was I in love with him? I don't know. He took hold of my existence, my mind, my soul, if I have a soul. I think I knew from the first that he was wicked, that it was an evil influence that held me; but I was like a creature possessed."

Her words had come in a torrent, and she stopped suddenly, breathless and panting.

"He had dominion over my mind; but I am a woman of the world, and I had strength enough and sense enough to resist him when he wanted me to go away with him, to disgrace myself, and bring shame and sorrow upon my husband. He had the power to make me miserable, but not to make me a social outcast, or a living lie, a wicked wife, who steers a difficult course between lover and husband,

and smiles in the face of the man she has dishonoured. He was angry with me when he found I was not an easy victim; and then he seemed to forgive me, and we became a kind of friends, whose friendship is sweet and bitter—honey and gall. I could hardly live without his society, and I encouraged him to hang about me. I tried to make my house pleasant to him, while I kept him at arm's length."

"Was he at arm's length that night in Paris? You must have known that it was disgraceful to sup with him *tête-à-tête* at a restaurant at three o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, I was in Paris alone, and I wanted to do something adventurous—but I knew I was mistress of the situation. I was at St. Germain with him all that day. We lunched at the Henri Quatre, and strolled in the forest, and drove back to Paris in the spring twilight. He was delightful. We talked of everything in heaven and earth. He bared his soul to me—his wicked, infidel soul—scoffing at all things good, even honour. I was under a charm. His wit, his eloquence, enchanted me. I look back now and think that it was the happiest day of my life—yes, the happiest. There is no other like it. His face, his eyes, his voice, all that was splendid and grand in him, will live in my memory for ever; and yet I know that he was the incarnation of evil."

"I thank God for his death, for your sake, Mary."

"You think that if he had lived, I should not have escaped; that I should have fallen, like the girl of whom you told me?"

"I think you were playing a game in which you must have been the loser."

"What became of that girl? Did she die?"

"No; she is in this house—with her mother."

"She is cured, I suppose, and will marry a grocer's assistant, or something of that kind, and be happy ever after."

"Would you like to see her?"

"To see one of Manville's victims? There were many such, I suppose. His path through life was strewed with broken hearts."

"It would be an object-lesson for you."

"Yes; I should like to see her."

Arden went downstairs in advance, and having obtained Mrs. Berry's permission, took his sister to the little back parlour, where Lisbeth was sitting, in the care of a trained nurse, a pleasant-looking young woman in a lavender uniform. The room had been brightened since Lisbeth's return. There were flowers on table and mantelpiece, daintily bound books, rosebud chintz curtains, white paint and rosebud wall-paper; improvements that had been provided by Arden, at whose advice the nurse had been engaged.

Lisbeth was sitting by the open window, where all the sunshine that found its way into the stony well outside fell on her face and figure. She was very pale, and there was a restless, unhappy look in her eyes, as of one who was always listening and waiting for some one who did not come. She had an open book on the little table in front of her, and her emaciated hand moved nervously about the pages.

"I have brought my sister to see you, Lisbeth," Arden said.

She had not looked at them as they came into the room, and she seemed to direct her eyes towards Arden with an effort.

"I did not know you had a sister," she said, without looking at the strange lady, whose appearance even in her tailor gown was a revelation to Nurse Evelyn.

"It was the hang of the skirt," she told her friends afterwards, when expatiating upon Lady Mary's clothes. "Only a plain tweed gown, but such style! You can't get that in the Edgware Road."

Mary went to the girl and took her hand gently, and stood looking down at her, with compassionate eyes.

"My poor child," she said; "my poor child!" and could find no other words.

"Oh, I am not a child," answered Lisbeth, fretfully. "I am a woman now. I was a child when I was happy. But then came unhappiness, and I knew I was a woman."

Her head was drooping as she said this; and then she lifted it suddenly, and stared at Lady Mary with wild eyes.

"Were you ever in hell?" she asked.

"Oh, Lisbeth dear, that's very naughty of you," remonstrated the nurse.

"Were you ever in hell?" she repeated insistently.

"No, no, my dear. You must not say such things."

"I have been in hell. My soul has been steeped in sin. I have been in the burning pit, among wicked women."

"My poor girl, your mind is full of delusions; you will forget, and be better, by-and-by."

"No, I shall never be any better. I have been in hell. That's what is the matter with me. The fires of hell have burnt up my life. Mother mustn't spend any more money on doctors. It's no use. I shall never change."

"She is not often as bad as this, ma'am," said the nurse. "Come, come, Lisbeth, you haven't shown the lady the lovely flowers Mr. Arden sent you yesterday—or your pretty books."

"My books! Yes, I love my books," said Lisbeth, the agonized expression of her countenance changing to a childish smile, and her hand fluttering the pages of the volume in front of her. "You love Byron, don't you?" she asked Lady Mary.

"Yes, with all my heart."

"And you know these lines?"

And then she read a familiar passage, very slowly, and in a tremulous voice, with her finger pointing out the words, like a child who is learning to read—

> "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
> 'Tis woman's whole existence——"

"Isn't it sad? Isn't it true?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm afraid it is true," said Mary, very gently. "Good-bye, my dear. But tell me, before I go, if there is anything I can send you, anything you would like?"

"Yes, there is something."

"What is it?"

"A portrait of Byron. I have only his bust—so white—like death. I should like a picture of him. It would seem alive. I should look up from my book and see his face, and think he was in the room with me. He was unhappy, wasn't he—very unhappy?"

"Yes, there was much sorrow in his life."

"I am glad of that. I like to think he was unhappy. It brings me nearer to him."

"You shall have his picture, my dear."

Mary Selby bent down and kissed the pale forehead, and pressed the wasted hand.

"Yes, she is an object-lesson," she said, as Arden took her to her cab. "I am very sorry for her. Strange that she never spoke of Manville."

"I believe she has forgotten him—that nothing is left of that time in her consciousness except a shapeless horror, which she expresses when she talks of having been in hell. In her calmer moods she talks about Byron—the object of her girlish adoration."

"Will she never be any better?"

"The doctors give little hope; but the poor mother is almost happy in having her to love and cherish. There never was a more devoted mother, or a more indefatigable worker."

"If I can do anything to help them, let me know."

"Happily, they need nothing. This house yields a good income; and to work for her daughter is Mrs. Berry's consolation."

Arden dined in Grosvenor Square at his sister's invitation about a week after that agitating interview in Jermyn Street.

There was nothing in the manner of the handsome matron, who gave him a smiling greeting in the midst of her splendour, to recall the intense emotions of that hour. She held herself with a royal dignity, magnificent in white satin, with a diamond and ruby tiara glittering above her dark-brown hair, her husband watching her with admiring eyes. The ruby tiara was his latest gift, and it pleased him to see how well it became her. The man was thorough, and only worshipped two things—money and his wife. They were going to a duchess's ball after their dinner-party, which was small, and at short notice.

Monsieur Villeneuve, the French novelist, the author of "Femme Funeste," was there, having developed a passion for London and London society; and Mr. Jordan, the American novelist, who had long ago become entirely English. The two men were talking literature, animated and deeply absorbed, when Arden arrived, while Mrs. Kelvin, a handsome widow, with her glances wandering

towards the Frenchman, tried to seem interested in Mr. Selby's conversation.

"I have not read his last," she said, "but I am told it is stronger than 'Femme Funeste,' and that was appalling."

"Whose last? Mr. Jordan's?"

"His? Oh no! His are always perfect. He chooses difficult problems; he sails very near the wind. But he touches things so delicately. And then there is the charm, don't you know; the charm of style——"

"I've never read any novelist since Dickens," said Selby. "When I want to read a novel, I read him again. I have all his books in my smoking-room. I just lift up my hand and take a volume from the shelf without looking, and open it anywhere, and read. I am always amused; though I know every one of them, almost by heart."

"Ah, I suppose that is the way to taste an author. But I never arrived at that point with any book except 'Madame Bovary.'"

Mr. Selby blushed. He had heard strange things of "Madame Bovary;" but the widow sat smiling placidly at him over her Louis-seize fan. In an age when style is the sole measure of literary excellence, morality has become an unconsidered detail.

The novelists were telling each other their manner of working.

"For my own poor work," said Mr. Jordan, gravely depreciative, as if he, the elect of the critics, were a worm and no man, "I require absolute seclusion, long tranquil hours, in which I do not hear a human voice or see a human face. I have a cottage in our Lake country—undiscovered by the tourist, remote even from the sound of a cow-bell."

"*Pour moi il me faut la vie orageuse*," said the Frenchman. "The more of tempest at night—wine—cards—*et le reste*—the more of calm in the morning. I rise at eight, after four hours' profound slumber. I take my coffee and roll, and I write with force, with fire, with my whole impassioned being, till seven in the evening—within closed doors, eleven hours, *sans boire ou manger*. Then I dress for dinner, and take up the thread of *la vie bruyante*."

Lady Mary was talking confidentially to her brother.

"There are only three more people coming," she said; "but they are people I want you to know. I dare say you have heard of Mr. Lorimer, the man who makes viaducts, and waterworks, and things."

"It would be difficult to live in the world and not hear of him. His work is everywhere—from London to Peru."

"Do you know him?"

"By sight only. I have seen him dining at my club—but he is not a member."

"He is coming with his wife and daughter—one of the loveliest girls I know, and a great heiress."

"With such merits I wonder I have not heard of her till to-night."

"If she were the average girl, her name and her frocks would be in all the society papers; she would always be shopping in Sloane Street."

"Why Sloane Street?"

"Don't you know? That is how the society gossips write of us. We are seen of a morning dashing about in hansoms, or shopping in Sloane Street. Sloane Street is what the Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells used to be in the eighteenth century. But Rachel Lorimer is not that kind of girl. She is the violet that hides among its leaves. And then, lovely as she is, the fact is, she is pi."

"Pi? What does that mean?"

"Churchy—fasts in Lent, and visits the poor. It is the only drawback, and, thank Heaven, she is not evangelical."

"What can bring you and Miss Lorimer together?"

"Oh, I cannot help admiring her, though I am not up to her in spiritual things. She forgives my worldliness, and hopes the best for me. Her father and my husband are old friends; and it seemed to me that, as a sister, I ought to give you the opportunity——"

"Of falling in love with an heiress, who would despise me if I wanted to marry her."

"She sets no value upon money. She is all sweetness and simplicity; and if she cared for you, the difference of fortune would weigh nothing with her."

"But it would have to weigh a great deal with me."

"At any rate, it can do you no harm to take her in to dinner."

The butler announced Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer, Miss Lorimer.

Arden moved aside as his sister welcomed her friends. He stood a little way off, watching the group; Lorimer, tall and broad shouldered, with iron-grey hair and beard, and strong resolute face, large grey eyes, severe and keen, eyes that had been looking intently at things, measuring distances, calculating the cubical contents of valleys, testing the level of viaducts, for half a century; Mrs. Lorimer, fifteen years younger, a large fair woman, in grey satin and old Venetian lace, and wearing a diamond tiara that outshone Lady Mary's rubies, an essentially commonplace person, but not vulgar; Miss Lorimer, the loveliest girl he had ever seen in his life, in his estimation undoubtedly the loveliest. She was like one of Raffaelle's saints that had walked out of a picture, and stood among them, radiant under her halo, a creature of a different world and a different race, finding herself by some strange accident in a Grosvenor Square drawing-room.

Her deep blue eyes looked round her with a divine simplicity that he had never seen except in the eyes of a child; but it was simplicity tempered by womanly thought. There was a lovely earnestness, a clear light of faith, as of one who had found all things good, and to whom sin and the ugliness of life were unknown.

Her hair was of the Raffaelle colour, a shadowy brown, with faint golden lights touching it here and there. Her features had Raffaelle's pure lines, correct without being severe, and her colouring was so delicate as to seem almost transparent, recalling to Arden's memory the fine warm alabaster of a bust in the Carthusian monastery near Florence.

She was dressed in white, and her gown was something gauzy and soft, with glimpses of satin here and there among the cloudlike folds. Her only ornament was a single row of pearls with a sapphire clasp, and Arden knew by instinct that pearls and sapphire were of unique beauty.

Her manner was quiet, but he saw no indication of shyness. The lovely eyes looked up at him thoughtfully as she took his arm. She did not fuss and chatter, as shyness generally does.

When they were seated at the dinner-table, in an atmosphere heavy with stephanotis and tuberose, he began with the usual kind of conversational opening, but with some apprehension, forewarned that she was pious, and not knowing how far the piety might go as an opposing force in conversation. He talked about the opera—Wagner, Mascagni. She worshipped Wagner. Her face grew vivid with enthusiasm as she talked of him. So far, all was well. So far, she was human.

He talked of the pictures of the year, and found that she took an intelligent interest in art, and knew a good deal about pictures, those of other years as well as the present season.

"My father is devoted to modern art," she said. "I believe he is a very good judge, and has rather a fine collection."

She did not speak of her father scoffingly, or with a patronizing indulgence, as a ridiculous person whom time had left on the rubbish-heap of worn-out beliefs and prejudices, after the manner of most of the daughters he had met.

He talked of the parties of the year—a wonderful ball at which he had been the night before, and of the duchess's ball to-night, to which he was bidden.

"No doubt you are to be there," he said.

"No; I don't go to dances now," she answered simply.

"Not now! Since when have you abjured such follies?"

"Since last year. It was my first season; and I went out a good deal just at the beginning. Mother liked to take me about among her friends; but I soon grew tired of parties. They are all alike. It is the same thing over and over again."

"But you must like dancing, I think."

"Must I? Well, to tell the truth, I do. I love an impromptu dance in our gallery at home, where the floor is perfection, with a few friends after dinner; but I hate to be in a mob of strangers, and to waltz with a young man who looks down at me with his eyes half shut, and behaves as if he were doing me an immense favour. I assure you it is not inspiring."

"I am very much of your opinion when my partner treats me as if she were waltzing with a chair; yet I go to big parties."

"Why?"

"To distract myself; to forget my own existence; to fuse my life in the life of the mob."

She looked at him wonderingly, then sadly, thinking he must have had troubles. She had noticed the look of trouble in his face when he was introduced to her; but he was smiling now, and his eyes were no longer shadowed.

"Do you never eat?" he asked presently, seeing her refuse *entrée* after *entrée*. "You took neither soup nor fish. I shall see you picking up single grains of rice presently, like the Oriental lady, who was so charming in every particular except that she was a Ghoul."

"Indeed, you are more likely to see me devour a plateful of rice-pudding. I am a vegetarian."

"My sister ought to have remembered the fact, and ordered special dishes."

"Oh, there will be plenty for me to eat presently"—glancing at her menu—"asparagus, Gâteau St. Honoré, Parmesan fondu—a magnificent dinner."

"What made you a vegetarian?"

"I have never eaten meat since I was six years old, when I saw a lamb dragged struggling into the slaughter-house, and my nurse told me they were going to kill him, the poor, pretty innocent creature. It was in the country, where I used to watch the lambs in the meadows playing with their mothers; and it hurt me to think that they should be carried away and killed. It seemed too cruel."

"You did not weigh the balance of good and evil—life or no life. You did not consider that if everybody fed on vegetables the lambs would never be born—or only enough of them to provide fleeces and tallow for the world; and heaven knows how the wool-growing sheep would be treated. If there were no butchers, do you suppose there would be half as many of those happy creatures gambolling in the spring sunshine—a life that is all April and May, in deep grass that is golden with buttercups—and then no wasting malady, no slow dissolution, 'the bright death quivered at

the victim's throat, touched, and *he* knew no more'? I think that animal-life, the consciousness of sunshine and sweet air, without other consciousness, must be the most blissful life; and we see as much in the outward expression of joy. Have you ever seen a man look as happy as a terrier scampering about a common?"

"Is not the hunting-man as happy, in what he calls a good run?"

"No; there is always the drawback of thought. He carries care at the back of his saddle. Will his horse go lame? Will the fourteen-mile ride home be detestable? Will that importunate creditor whose letter he received that morning drive him into the bankruptcy court? The terrier lives in every limb, in every muscle; life without thought."

"And it does not pain you to think that harmless creatures are killed in order that you may have mutton-chops?"

"Not at all, if their death is as painless as science can make death, and if they are cared for at all stages of their existence, and protected from the possibility of ill-usage. I look to the legislature to protect all helpless creatures, to put a stop to the transport of living animals under painful conditions; but I believe with Lewes, and many other physiologists, that man is a meat-eating animal, and that he cannot thrive upon pulse and herbs. Here is the asparagus; and I shall no longer see you starving."

"You have eaten very little yourself."

"Have I not? It has been so pleasant to talk. And you foreswore mutton-chops at six years old? That was wonderful. And it was more wonderful that in such an infantine stage of your career you were allowed to do so."

"I have always been allowed to do as I like."

"Always! Did no troublesome doctors intervene and order animal-food?"

"I have not suffered from the burden of doctors. I have hardly ever been ill."

He looked at her with admiring curiosity. Yes, though so finely moulded, with such pure translucent colouring, she had an air of perfect health. Her eyes had the exquisite

clearness rarely seen after childhood, her lips the delicate carmine in which there is no touch of fever, her cheeks the soft bloom that betokens a nature where no element of mind or body is at war with the rest; a nature divinely calm, divinely pure, as poets have imagined the angelic temperament.

> "A being *far* too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food,"

thought Arden, distorting his beloved Wordsworth.

"And you have actually been allowed to do as you like," he said, in a playful tone. "Is that because you are one of those young ladies with an appalling temper, whom parents and guardians are afraid to tackle—the novelist's termagant heroine, who always develops angelic qualities before the end of the story?"

"It is because my father and mother are the kindest people in the world."

"They look kind," said Arden, glancing round the table, from Mr. Lorimer's shrewd face, with the pleasant twinkle in the grey eyes, to Mrs. Lorimer's large and placid countenance, smiling blandly on Mr. Selby as she listened to him.

"I could never tell you how good they are to me," she said. "From my babyhood they have given me my own way."

"Then I have no doubt your own way is a good way. Mr. Lorimer looks quite capable of dealing with a rebellious daughter."

"How could I ever rebel when they are so indulgent?"

"And you are daughter and son—all they have in the world?"

"Yes, I am all. Isn't it sad for them? My father would have so loved a son. I have so longed for a brother. I used to pray for one every day of my life."

"And you have left off praying now?"

"I have left off asking God for brothers and sisters. I have learnt to submit."

"And you are very fond of your parents?"

"Fond! Why, I adore them. How could I do otherwise?"

Arden smiled, recalling various Regans and Gonerils of his acquaintance; most of whom had talked of their mothers as imbecile, and their fathers as impossible; some of whom indeed had depicted the author of their being as quite the most odious character they had ever encountered; and none of whom believed in any parental virtue except the willingness to write a cheque.

"I wouldn't mind my father being horridly extravagant, if he were not detestably mean," said one.

"I shouldn't complain of his eighteen-penny cigars, if he didn't grumble at every hat I wear," said another.

"I should say nothing about his always being out, if he didn't lead us such a life when he is at home," said a third, who came from Dublin.

And, behold, here was a girl who owned to adoring her parents, and had nothing but praise for them!

Mr. Lorimer was the chief talker during the quarter of an hour after the ladies had gone. He was relating some of his experiences in South America; the revolutions of a week, not without bloodshed; the labour difficulties, the adventures and perils attending the carrying out of a great engineering work in Peru. Arden contrived to move near him, and listened with keen interest. The man was one of nature's gentlemen, strong, straightforward, not the first prosperous man of his race, and not having begun the world with the proverbial half-crown. The primary half-crown had been there two generations back. David Lorimer and David Lorimer's father had been at Winchester and Oxford; but David Lorimer's grandfather came of a race of peasants and Bible Christians, whence the Scriptural name; had trudged to the village day-school with his satchel on his back, and his dinner of bread and bacon in his satchel, and had ended all his schooling at thirteen years of age.

Selby introduced Lorimer to his brother-in-law, as Arden slipped into the empty chair near him.

"I saw you talking to my daughter," the contractor said presently, when he had finished one of his South American stories. "Was she tackling you on one of her pet subjects?"

"We were discussing vegetarianism."

"Oh, that is a trifle. She let you off lightly. It might have been working-girls' clubs, day-nurseries, children's hospitals, old-age pensions. She is as full of philanthropic fads as a provincial newspaper of quack medicines."

"I can imagine that she would care for other people more than for herself."

"Too much, too much. Altruism with her is a passion. But we let her have her own way. It has been a rule with her mother and me to let her do as she likes, ever since she was a baby. But I have watched her like a lynx most of the time; and I have never discovered one unworthy impulse, or one foolish thought; unless it is foolish to worship God and to care for all His creatures. But I am boring you with this talk about my daughter. You see, she is an only child; and her mother and I are a little weak about her."

"You have reason to be proud of her. She is the loveliest girl I have seen for a long time—in all my life, I think."

"Oh, that is only the husk. It is the immortal spark inside that I am proud of. But that's not the way to talk at a dinner-table. Do you see the two novelists over there, nose to nose, talking shop? I'd bet a thousand pounds they are telling each other that, except their own stories, there hasn't been a good novel written since 'Tom Jones.'"

"Shop is the most delightful talk."

"So it is. I have been telling them my engineering adventures—boring them to death, I dare say; but if there were another civil engineer here, we should want to talk till midnight. Are you going to the duchess's ball?"

"I shall look in for an hour. I'm sorry Miss Lorimer is not to be there."

"Her mother is sorrier. We are going to put in an appearance, just to show that we are grateful for the card. The duke is one of my best friends, and looks after my interests in the Upper House. But Rachel has set her face against all evening parties this year. She would not have dined here to-night if she were not very much attached to your sister. Lady Mary has gone heart and soul into some of my girl's schemes. You might think she was too fine a

lady to interest herself in an East End *crèche;* but she is such a many-sided woman."

Arden and his new acquaintance went upstairs together, and strolled through the dazzling suite to the room where Mrs. Lorimer and Mary Selby were sitting.

Lorimer introduced Arden to his wife, with a certain *empressement*, and presently the conversation turned upon pictures, and upon the great man's gallery in Carlton House Terrace.

"I have heard great praise of your pictures," said Arden.

"You must come and look at them," answered Lorimer. "Very likely you'll be disappointed, and write me down a Philistine. They are all modern. No early Italian masters. Not even a Veronese, or a Titian, or a Rubens. There are four fine Whistlers, six Millais, a Holman Hunt, three of Clara Montalba's Venetian pictures, and some of her London sketches, which I hold no less precious; a lion picture and a dog picture by Briton Riviere, a bit of modern life by Frith, and a 'Return from Egypt' by Frederick Goodall."

"My dear David," remonstrated his wife, "Mr. Arden will find the catalogue in the gallery. You may spare him to-night."

"Come and see my pictures. I should like your opinion of them."

"Indeed, I am no connoisseur."

"Then you are not like most of Lady Mary's friends, who pretend to know more about pictures than the men who paint them."

"Oh, the only infallible judges are the men who don't paint," said Arden.

"I am always at home on Saturday afternoons," said Mrs. Lorimer.

"You are very kind. I shall take an early opportunity."

"Do. Saturday is my half-holiday," said Lorimer. "I'll show you Rachel's den, if she's out of the way, and you'll see what a woman of business she is—only nineteen on her last birthday."

"Only nineteen."

Arden thought of the girl in the little back parlour, the

girl of nineteen, whose life was broken off short like the snapped stem of a flower. The flower remained above ground, but withered and faded, colour and perfume gone for ever.

While they were talking, Arden's eyes had wandered to the octagon room, where the two novelists, Mrs. Kelvin and Rachel Lorimer, were carrying on an animated conversation.

The talk was of books, and the widow had in a manner gone to the top of the class, on its being discovered that she had read all the notorious French novels of the last few years, without any prudish restrictions. Mr. Jordan's delicate stories she declared she knew by heart, and owned without a blush to having "devoured" "Femme Funeste."

"When are you going to horrify us again?" she asked, and, without waiting for the Frenchman's answer, turned to the American. "And you, Mr. Jordan? I hope your next is ready for Mudie?"

"It seems ungrateful to complain," murmured Mr. Jordan, smilingly, "but one's readers have an idea that a novelist never has occasion to rest upon his oars and look about him for a subject."

"He has no occasion," retorted the widow. "There are no subjects in our modern novels; only beautiful words, exquisite phrases, 'jewels five words long,' as Browning says."

"Tennyson," murmured Rachel, involuntarily.

"Ah, then you do read something, Miss Lorimer," said Jordan, who had been gazing at her in quiet ecstasy.

She had confessed to not knowing his novels, or anybody's novels, except Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray; and he had not been offended. How could any man be offended with such divine beauty? She was a type he had dreamt of, pen in hand, in the stillness of a summer morning, far away among his lakes and mountains. "You do read sometimes?" he repeated.

"I read Tennyson and Browning, my twin stars."

"And Shakespeare?"

"Yes, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge."

"And Shelley?"

"I used to worship Shelley; but his dreams are too vague. I cannot grasp them."

The Frenchman had been careful not to inquire if she had read *his* books.

"In my country young ladies do not read novels," he said deprecatingly. "That deprives us of an exquisite reward, but affords us a wider liberty. There are, indeed, a few who write for *la jeunesse;* but, alas, when we are chaste we are intolerably dull. I would recommend mademoiselle to stick to Racine, and Lafontaine's Fables, rather than to bore herself with our virtuous romances."

Mrs. Lorimer summoned her daughter, and the little group scattered itself. Rachel shook hands with the widow, and bowed her good night to the three men; but Arden attended her and her mother to their carriage, which was to convey Rachel to Carlton House Terrace before taking Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer to the ball.

"Don't you repent, even at this last moment, of having refused the best party of the season?" he asked Rachel.

"Not in the least. I have ever so many letters to write before midnight."

"Busy person! You fill me with awe. Good night."

"Good night."

His hand sought hers across the carriage door, after shaking hands with her mother, and the slender little gloved hand fluttered into his own for a moment, light as a falling leaf.

He walked to Jermyn Street. His step was buoyant. The June air smelt of Paradise.

"Oh, I have been happy! I have been happy!" he said to himself. "My burden has been lifted off. There was no unseen wickedness hovering near me while I was with her."

Life seemed new; his very being had changed. Hope had come back to him, the divine forward-looking spirit which lightens the life that is with the vague sweetness of joys that are to come. Hope had been dead in him since those days in Paris. But now his heart beat high, and he began again to look forward.

He forgot all about the duchess's ball, and spent an hour in the stillness of the Mall, looking up now and then at the

lighted windows of the terrace above him, and wondering in which house and in which room Rachel Lorimer was writing her letters. There were three lighted windows on the third floor, French windows opening on a balcony, and he thought that must be the "den" Lorimer had talked about, the business-like room in which the young philanthropist toiled in the cause of humanity.

IX.

Lady Mary's little dinner had taken place on Thursday, and Arden called in Carlton House Terrace on the following Saturday. It seemed rather like seizing upon an opportunity offered perhaps in casual politeness. The most hardened heiress-hunter could not have shown himself more eager; but Arden had forgotten that Rachel was an heiress. He only remembered that she had given him his first hour of happiness since the beginning of his trouble. That mysterious trouble was not utterly gone from him. Only in her presence had he been unconscious of the haunted feeling, the impalpable something that suggested the existence of an unknown world where all was evil. But that nameless horror had been lessened even when he thought of her in absence; as if her image in his mind had power to exorcise the demon.

Mr. Lorimer's house was the largest in the terrace. To make room for his pictures he had joined two houses, and had thus obtained a spacious gallery running all the length of the southern façade, with six long windows, but no top light, a want he was always lamenting. The gallery, however, was charming for a summer drawing-room, and the floor had been made perfect for dancing; but in the spaciousness of the engineer's surroundings there was nothing that suggested the *nouveau riche*, no lavish display of brand-new splendours, *le dernier cri* in modern upholstery. Mr. Lorimer had bought the two houses with their contents, from their two noble owners, had retained all that was good in the furniture and had arranged all his decorations in the same minor key. There was, therefore, a sober old-established air in all the rooms, where there were cabinets and bookcases that had been standing in the same place since the

terrace was built while William the Fourth was king, and where old-fashioned sofas and original grandfather chairs were relieved by Persian carpets of subdued richness.

The sober furniture, the plain dark liveries, impressed Arden as he looked about him after a few words with Mrs. Lorimer, who received him in the picture-gallery, where there were a good many people, chiefly women, and where the master of the house was making the round of his pictures with a girl of sixteen, who said, "Oh, how too lovely!" before every picture, and held her breath in an agony of shyness, which her cicerone took for ecstasy.

"It is so good of Mr. Lorimer to take such trouble for my poor Backfisch," said the girl's mother.

Lorimer would have taken a cabman or a coal-heaver round his gallery with equal satisfaction. To look at his pictures or to talk about them was his delight, and he could put up with a good deal of ineptitude in his audience. He didn't even object to the people who exclaimed "Land-seer!" when they came to the Briton Rivieres, or who obviously could make nothing of a nocturne by Whistler, staring in blank wonder at the blue night-sky, and the ghostly figures and glimmering lamps in a dim garden; Mabille, Vauxhall—what you will. He dropped the school-room miss, and possessed himself of Arden, as soon as he was aware of his presence.

"I don't think there's anything else you'll care for," he told her, in his kind, cheerful voice. "Go and make them give you plenty of chocolate cakes with your tea."

And then he escorted Arden solemnly from picture to picture; Arden, who had learnt most of them by heart on the Academy walls, and who was looking with perturbed glances towards the door through which he hoped to see Rachel enter. One comprehensive look on arriving had assured him that she was not in the room.

"Is Miss Lorimer too busy to appear among your friends?" he asked at last, standing with absent gaze before the finest of the Millais.

"She is always busy," answered Lorimer. "But she will be here presently, I dare say, for Mrs. Bellingham is here, and Mrs. Bellingham is Rachel's mother abbess in philanthropy."

"Mrs. Bellingham is an admirable woman. She is a connection of our family by marriage; but we are very slight acquaintances, much as I admire her for her charitable work. She is the least ostentatious of women; but these things make themselves known. Father Romney, the East End parson, was telling me about her."

"'Father,'" exclaimed Lorimer, laughing. "Yes, that is Rachel's particular parson. Father Romney! There were no fathers in the Protestant Church when I was a young man."

"And there is no Protestant Church now. That is all the difference," said Arden.

A fine lady came sailing towards them, wanting to see the Millais, and Arden moved away, and dropped into a chair just vacated next Mrs. Bellingham. He had been watching for his opportunity to cultivate Rachel's mother abbess. She was a tall, stout woman on the wrong side of sixty, with silvery hair and a beautiful countenance; not the beauty of outline or colouring, but the light of the lamp inside which Lorimer had talked about.

"I hope you haven't forgotten me," he said, as they shook hands; "you know we are a kind of relations."

"I have not forgotten either you or the family link; but we meet very seldom."

"Will you allow the seldom to become often in the future? I hope you don't think I am incapable of being interested in your good work."

"One hardly expects a young man in society to be keenly interested in day-nurseries and children's hospitals."

"That is because you have made up your mind to think poorly of young men, unless they renounce all the pomps and vanities. Cannot one keep some of the vanities, and yet be useful in one's generation?"

"Cannot one serve two masters, you mean?" said Mrs. Bellingham. "That is what we are all trying to do."

"Even you, when you come to tea in Carlton House Terrace?"

"Alas! yes. I ought to be in Ratcliffe Highway at this very moment, sorting clothes for a jumble sale." And then, with a serio-comic look, measuring him as it were from head to foot, "Any clothes you don't want would be of the greatest use to us in the East End."

"For dock-labourers?"

"No; for poor clerks, reduced gentlemen, who are fighting against Fate."

"I must send you a cheque instead. My servant has a lien on my clothes. They silently vanish away when they begin to show wear. But I might offer to buy them from him on an old clothesman's valuation."

"I'm afraid you'll think I am a terrible woman to begin pestering you so soon," said Mrs. Bellingham, laughing. "But we are all like that; we beg almost automatically, like Mrs. Lorimer's poodle"—glancing at a beribboned, silver-braceletted creature, with a large 'L' standing fluffily up on a back clipped to the smoothness of black satin, who was squatting on his haunches beside the tea-table.

"You have a supreme right to call upon me," said Arden. "Are we not relations? Oh, here is Miss Lorimer. Does she also attack her friends' pockets?"

"No; she never begs. She only gives."

Rachel came straight to them, greeted her dearest Mrs. Bellingham with delight, and shook hands smilingly with Arden.

"Has Auntie Belle got hold of you?" she asked. "How have you come into her clutches?"

"We are old friends—indeed a kind of relations."

"How expensive that must be for you!"

"It has cost me nothing yet. Aunt Belle has neglected me shamefully."

"Aunt Belle! How dare you call her by the name that I invented for her?"

"But if I am her nephew?"

"What, is she really your aunt—my own Mrs. Bellingham, actually your aunt?"

"I don't like to be too positive. My father's sister married Mrs. Bellingham's cousin, Jack Bellingham, of the Scots Greys. He was handsome, and she was jealous, poor woman. In his regiment I believe they called them Bel and the Dragon."

"But that would not make you her nephew."

"Wouldn't it? Anyhow, I know we are near relations."

"If you don't mind, I am sure she won't; as long as she can screw cheques out of you."

"Is she such an unconscionable harpy?"

"Utterly unconscionable, when there is good to be done."

Mrs. Bellingham watched the two animated faces with admiring interest. Good looks were hereditary in the Wildernsea family; and Arden had the farther advantage of a beautiful mother. He did not belie either race, the patrician or the plebeian. He had the Arden strength and regularity of outline, and the sensitive mother's variety of expression; and in Rachel's company he looked his best, animated and happy.

The three were grouped near an open window, a little aloof from the herd, Rachel sharing an S-shaped sofa with her friend, Arden standing in front of them. He had brought them tea, and had found a little table for their cups and saucers, and was ineffably content to wait upon them.

"What a pretty little frock," said Mrs. Bellingham, looking at Rachel's simple muslin, with its froth of creamy lace. "I hope it is from your slum dressmaker."

"It *is* from my slum dressmaker. I'm glad you like it."

"Is that a new idea?" asked Arden. "Are the slums superseding Bond Street?"

"Not with girls who respect themselves," answered Mrs. Bellingham. "They can't wear a gown without a name, or love a dog that is not a prize-winner. Rachel has no self-respect, and her frocks are made by a young widow, who was working for a fashionable dressmaker, and starving herself in order to feed her children. We have set her up in business, Rachel and I; and we bid defiance to our friends, in clothes that cost a tithe of what they pay, and yet leave a handsome profit for our poor widow."

"She lives in a little back street," said Rachel. "Half the cost of smart people's clothes is for the Mayfair rooms, and the show-women's silk gowns."

"Your white frock is lovely," said Arden; "but I suppose there is a mysterious something wanting—'the cut,' I think my sister calls it, when she explains why her tweed skirt and coat cost thirty pounds."

"Rachel and I do without the cut," said Mrs. Bellingham. "She is young enough, and I am old enough, to dispense with ideal excellence."

"My tailor lives on the wrong side of Oxford Street, and my dressmaker in a tiny street at the back of a mews," said Rachel, "and yet I am not unhappy."

Even while they were talking a languid voice was drawling near them.

"She had the gown back five times, and it doesn't fit any better than at the beginning," said the voice; "but she declares it does, and I daren't offend her." And then there was a confidential murmur in the ear of the listener.

"Oh, but your gown was lovely. I thought it was the prettiest in the room last night. You had told me about it, you know, so I took particular notice."

"I'm glad it looked decent."

"I said it was the prettiest, dear."

"I was in agonies half the evening. I could scarcely breathe."

"Oh, but she has such good style, don't you know; however *décolletés* her frocks are, they are never vulgar."

"I hope you didn't think mine too *décolleté*."

"Oh no, not quite, quite too!"

Arden sent Mrs. Bellingham a cheque for five and twenty pounds that night, with "Old clo'" written on the sheet of notepaper that covered it. And on Monday he received an invitation from the Lorimers at less than a week's notice, Mr. Lorimer delighting in small, friendly dinners of an old-fashioned pattern, and rarely giving formal banquets. He had quite enough of big dinners in the various public feasts to which he was bidden, being eminently popular among the working men of the world—Academy dinners, political dinners, mess dinners, farewell dinners, Mansion House dinners, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Ironmongers, Tallow-chandlers. So in his own house he liked to entertain frequently, and to obey the impulse of the moment as to the choice of company. It was one of the pleasantest houses in London, cosmopolitan, universal, as to the guests, who included all sorts and conditions of men, from the East End parson admired by Rachel, to American actors, Japanese law-students, and coloured statesmen from the Central American Republics. A man who is known and

popular over half the inhabited earth has a wide range of acquaintance.

"Our London house is like a caravanserai," Rachel told Arden, who was the only young man at this particular dinner. "My father receives three or four letters of introduction every day, and you must never be surprised at meeting any one here."

"Not even the Cham of Tartary?"

"If there is such a person, and he should come to London, he would inevitably bring a letter for my father."

"And I suppose African missionaries and South Sea bishops are the only people in the motley crowd whom you care about?"

"Why do you think me so narrow? I am interested in all interesting people."

"And you don't consider it wicked to act, or to write novels?"

"No, no, indeed. Life ought to be made pleasant for everybody."

"Pleasant with innocent pleasures?"

"Of course. You should see a dance at the East End!"

"Are there such things? I thought the only dancing for those poor people was of the kind that French workmen call *dansant devant le buffet*."

"What does that mean?"

"To go without one's dinner."

"A good many of them have to do that very often; but it does not prevent them being happy when the chance comes. They are so patient, so ready to be pleased."

"They do not look before and after. They are unconscious philosophers, and make the best of life."

"Patience is their philosophy. Father Romney has a club for the young people, where they dance twice a week. He has had them taught simple easy dances."

"Kitchen lancers, for instance?"

"All sorts of square dances, and old, old country dances. They are not a scrap rough, after a little practice."

"Have you ever ventured to take the floor with one of them?"

"I always dance at least once when I am there."

"And you attend these festivities often?"

"As often as I can. Mrs. Bellingham takes me. We wear our finest gowns, because they love to see pretty clothes. Would you like to go with us some evening? Father Romney would be charmed to see you."

"'*Die Kirche hat einen guten Magen*,'" quoted Arden. "Will he want me to sell all that I have and give it to Ratcliffe Highway?"

"That is very unkind of you."

"I didn't really mean it. I shall be glad to help him. I am sure this East End parson of yours must be a very fine creature. He puts my purposeless sauntering life to shame."

"Why should your life be purposeless?"

"Why, ah, why? Because I was born so, I suppose. Created to believe nothing, and to do nothing; to go down under the River of Death without leaving a ripple on the surface."

She looked at him with an inquiring expression, anxious even; and a shadow came over her face which had before been radiant with the light of a happy nature. Half the charm of her character was that gaiety of heart, the joyousness of a being who has never doubted or feared, to whom life has seemed always good and the world always beautiful.

"To believe nothing," she repeated, in a subdued voice. "That would be dreadful. But I know you do not mean that."

They were sitting in the spacious stone balcony, where other guests had come to take their coffee in the cool night air, with the lamp-dotted quiet of the Park below them, and in front of them the gloom of the Abbey towers, and the electric light above the Parliament house shining like a star, to tell them that Party Government was doing the best it could for them in a tortuous but well-meaning way.

They had sat side by side at dinner, and they had been talking for some time, since Arden's escape from the dining-room.

"I must go and talk to Aunt Belle," said Rachel, rising and moving towards the drawing-room window.

"And will you ask Mrs. Bellingham to send me a card for one of your East End drums?" he said, following her.

"It had better be for one of our Happy Evenings, and then you could recite something."

"Recite! Prodigious! I am no more capable of such a thing than Dominie Sampson."

"Or you could tell us something about your travels in Italy—about Rome, for instance."

"In a familiar easy-going way, with plenty of comic relief, a cross between Lord Rosebery and a Patagonian bishop. Alas! I am incapable of so much as that. You must let me sit among the audience and applaud."

"Even that is useful, isn't it, Aunt Belle? But will you mind whom you sit next? That is the test—the standard—by which we judge our recruits."

"I will not mind, even if my neighbour should be a chimney-sweep."

"He might be worse than a sweep. Chimney-sweeps are among our upper ten."

"Whatever he is, I will put up with him."

Mrs. Bellingham smiled her sweet, serious smile. She had seen so many young men interested in Rachel Lorimer's work for Rachel Lorimer's sake, and eager to join the philanthropic crusade under her leadership. But most of them had fallen away when they found themselves no nearer the beauty and heiress in Whitechapel or Poplar than in Mayfair. To interest themselves in the working man and the working woman had seemed a short cut to Rachel's favour; and it was a disappointment to discover that Rachel was much more interested in the children of toil in the East than in these well-groomed crusaders from the West; and that the reward for the long martyrdom of Happy Evenings, with fourth-rate conjurers or sixth-rate musicians, or unspeakably boring reciters, was no more than a smile that shone alike upon the washed and the unwashed.

"Will this one fall away like the rest?" Mrs. Bellingham wondered.

Was it the beauty or the heiress that allured him? There was a light on his face, a tone in his voice that seemed to mean more than the cheap enthusiasm of previous adorers. Was he in earnest? His countenance had the stamp of thought, and was more worn and haggard than it ought to have been on the sunward side of thirty. There were traces

of suffering also, which set Mrs. Bellingham wondering what kind of trouble had overshadowed his youth. She was interested in him already, and her life among all sorts and conditions of men having made her a keen observer of character and temperament, it was natural to her to theorise about any one who attracted her. She would not class him among the heiress hunters. She thought he was honestly in love with Rachel, who, to her mind, was the most lovable girl in creation.

Mrs. Bellingham was hardly surprised at receiving a visit from the man she had been thinking about on the following afternoon.

"You did not ask me to call upon you," Arden said, when they had shaken hands. "But I thought as we are a kind of relations, I might venture——"

"I am very glad to see you. I don't ask young men to call in Bedford Square, unless it is some one particularly interested in my work, as I think perhaps you are."

The room in which she received him was her library, spacious and lofty, lined with books from floor to ceiling, and provided with two large business-like writing-tables with drawers and pigeon-holes, one in front of a side window, the other near the fireplace. A large bay with three long windows looked over a garden—positively a garden—with a little avenue of stunted limes, and low walls covered with passion-flowers and ivy. There were pyramids of flower-pots on stands on each side of the stone steps, and a small grass-plot on a lower level, with a background of hardy shrubs; and the prospect made an oasis of verdure and bright colour in the midst of central London.

"I love this old house," she told Arden, when he praised her surroundings; "and I tremble for the day when leases will expire and changes may come."

"You have such a dignified neighbour in the Museum."

"And think how delightful it is to be able to run round to the reading-room whenever I have a morning hour to spare."

"It surprises me that you should ever have a spare hour, knowing the multiplicity of your engagements."

"I work late at night. At my age one does not want long hours for sleep."

She knew that he came to her because she was Rachel's friend, and that he wanted her to talk about Rachel. She was kind and encouraging, believing in his absolute sincerity.

"Have you met with many other girls as enthusiastic in the service of humanity?" he asked presently.

"With many as enthusiastic, but with none as steadfast. Rachel is altogether exceptional. From her childhood she has cared for all things that suffer—first for animals, and then for children, and now for men and women. Pity is the first instinct of her mind. She goes among creatures whom you would shrink from with disgust and horror, if not with detestation; and she has but one thought about them, their suffering, their cruel fate."

"And her people have given her a free hand?"

"Mrs. Lorimer would take off her shoes to give to a barefooted beggar, if the beggar came her way; but hers is only a passive benevolence. She does not leave her easy-chair to look for hard cases. Mr. Lorimer is a wonder of broad-minded charity. Perhaps no other father in London, placed as he is, would allow an only daughter like Rachel to devote the greater part of her life to working among the poorest of the poor."

"He admires her too much to thwart her, I think."

"Yes, but how many men in his position would admire virtues of that kind? They would treat her charitable instincts as foul weeds, to be eradicated at any cost. She is fortunate in her parents. They know that she is safe with me, and with Father Romney, and they let her take her own way."

"In return for which indulgence she adores them," said Arden.

"Yes, they have their reward."

"Have you known her long?"

"We have been friends and allies for the last four years. She read a letter of mine in the *Times*, a letter pleading for a *crèche* in a terrible part of East London, and she sent me a quarter's pocket-money, with a delicious letter. She was not fifteen, and she wrote like Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, with divine pity and love in every line. We were friends from that hour. We started our day-nursery together; and it was delightful to see her interest in every detail, her quick

understanding of the circumstances and trials of the mothers, of the needs of the children. She worked her fingers to the bone in making clothes for the poorest of them, and toiled like a charwoman, scrubbing, and dusting, and cleaning windows, when she was among them."

"And the Lorimers don't object to her doing such things?"

"Object! David Lorimer comes of a family who have worshipped God in their own simple evangelical way from generation to generation."

"But Miss Lorimer is of the Ritualistic school. Has not that been a trial for the father?"

"There are no real differences among Christians. Mr. Lorimer is liberal in all things, and allows his daughter to think for herself."

"And Mrs. Lorimer—— ?"

"Allows her daughter to think for her. They go to the same churches, and admire the same preachers."

Arden would have stayed with Mrs. Bellingham for hours, if she would have discoursed on the same theme; but two neat parlourmaids entered presently, bringing a long deal board, which they placed upon trestles in the centre of the room, and then proceeded to cover it with a snow-white tablecloth and a double row of cups and saucers, glass bowls of jam, piles of bread and butter, mountains of plum cake, and stacks of sandwiches.

"You have a tea-party this afternoon, I see," he said, taking up his hat.

"I have the same kind of party every week; thirty young women from one of the numerous clubs in different parts of London. My visitors this afternoon are coming from Islington. Would you like to stop and hand bread and butter?"

"If I could be really useful," he said, hesitating.

"No, Rachel is not coming to my party," she said, answering his unspoken question. "She has gone to spend an hour with a sick woman in Poplar."

Arden put down his hat.

"Let me stay and help you. Let me feel that I am doing something for the sake of the work, and not because I admire Miss Lorimer."

"I should like you to stay. You own to admiring her?"

"Who can do otherwise? And for the rest—'it were all one that I should love a bright particular star and think to wed it.'"

"'Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall,'" said Mrs. Bellingham, smiling. "You may be sure of one thing, Rachel will not marry for position, or to add wealth to wealth. She will love no man whom she cannot honour and esteem. You best know if you are worthy to hope."

X.

Arden cast in his lot with the people who spend some part of their lives in trying to brighten the lives of others, of that vast multitude, the toilers and the castaways, the honest and the dishonest, who exist and are even contented under conditions that must needs seem intolerable to those who come to them from that brighter world where there are food and raiment and space and comfort for everybody ; where it is easy to imitate the lilies of the field, and not to take trouble for a to-morrow that is amply provided for with gilt-edged securities.

He was only the humblest of subalterns in the army of workers. He went where Mrs. Bellingham and Rachel bade him go, and did what they told him to do. He attached himself to Father Romney, and learnt much from that indomitable cleric. He saw the rough and the smooth among the submerged masses ; and while he wondered at the brutality of some, he wondered still more at the patience of others.

Rachel's favourite old women were a revelation. Their long record of incessant toil, their meek acceptance of the lowest place at the table of life, their capacity to exist upon a pittance that would seem to him scarcely a maintenance for a mongrel dog, their heroic struggle for cleanliness and fresh air in a loathsome environment, impressed him strongly. He admired the cheerful smile with which a widow of seventy-five winters glanced round her "bit of a place;" proud of the curly Staffordshire dogs with baskets in their mouths that adorned her mantelpiece, and her Windsor chairs, beeswaxed and polished to the mellow darkness of old Spanish mahogany ; while apologizing for the broken ceiling through which the rain had come last winter, and which the landlord had neglected to repair.

"I ask about it when I pay my rent every week," she said, "but I sometimes think the collector won't take the trouble to speak for me. He writes something on his wristband, but nothing comes of it; and I suppose some day the ceiling will tumble down and bury me alive in my bed."

She said this jocosely, and with a complacent glance at the poor truckle bed, neatly covered with a patchwork quilt. Arden admired the quilt, and elicited the fact that it was the work of the dame's grandchildren, boys and girls, and was an altogether superior article, as it was made of trouser patterns, the boys being journeymen tailors.

All things were alike to Arden in Rachel's service. He endured even the Happy Evenings, which were perhaps the greatest trial; for the Happy Evenings had to be long, and the atmosphere in a Victoria Hall of corrugated iron, flavoured with oranges, saveloy sandwiches, and strong beer, was not conducive to physical enjoyment. It was a wonder to him to see Rachel sitting serene and cool at an old grand piano, accompanying the singers and fiddlers, radiant and indefatigable. The necessity of taking part in the good work had made him a reader, and he mounted the platform once or twice in an evening to read a scene from Ivanhoe or from Pickwick. He found that the boys and girls preferred Ivanhoe, the men and women Pickwick.

How could he stint his service or deem any task a burden, when he was happier than he had ever been in his life? It was not the first time he had been in love. He had suffered a boy's fancies, a young man's follies; but this love, in its freshness and purity, so far excelled all those adventures and escapades of his youth as to seem a first love. He forgot every dream and aspiration of the past, in the exquisite happiness of the present. And the indescribable horror that had weighed him to the earth, the incubus, the nameless dread, had been lifted from his soul. As his friendship for Rachel ripened the horror lessened. Her image filled his mind and heart, was always with him, waking or dreaming. Sometimes he thought that Douglas Campbell's prophecy had been fulfilled, and that a diabolical influence had been exorcised by that pure presence. At other times he took a common-sense view of his case, and told himself that the whole thing had been no more than a mental state, a

consequence of shattered nerves, the natural result of his fatal encounter with Manville.

"The temperament of the duellist, who could kill his man without remorse, has been lost to Englishmen in the last few generations," he thought, remembering Camelford and Best, and various fatal duels of the past.

The season was over, and the Lorimers left Carlton Terrace, Mr. Lorimer for Honduras, where he had a water-supply in progress, Mrs. Lorimer and Rachel for a villa at Goring, from which riverside paradise the railway would bring Rachel to her friends in the East.

Here Arden was hospitably invited, and often made one of the house-party. Mrs. Bellingham also was frequently there; and batches of work-girls from London appeared on the smiling scene every now and then, and had to be taken on the river, and entertained with picnic dinners and teas, on willowy islands. Arden had his hands full on these occasions, and, if he was not staying at the villa, came down from London with the convoy, and laboured in the good cause from morning till night.

And in all this time, during the growth of a friendship that all the world might see, there had been no word of love spoken; and Arden sometimes wondered if he was any more to Rachel than the Saturday to Monday visitors from town, or the guardsmen from Windsor who rowed in her boat and played croquet in her garden, the light and the frivolous, who were always ready to lend a hand in any of her philanthropic schemes, and always obviously doing it for her sake. Was he more to her, nearer to her? More than once she had told him that he was the best of her lieutenants, the cleverest and the most steadfast.

"And I believe you like the work," she said, "and that you don't do it by way of being polite to me and pleasing mother."

"Yes, I like the work. I am interested in your people; but—if you were not there to guide me—I doubt if I should persevere."

"Oh, I cannot think so meanly of you. Now that you have seen them, and know what they suffer, and how patient and brave they are, you would never turn your back on them."

"No, no; I could never be as I have been—having seen and known their lives. But I need you. My inspiration is from you."

She looked at him with that earnest inquiring look he knew so well. Deeply religious as he knew her to be, she had never spoken to him of her creed. She had encouraged him in good works; but she had left that larger question untouched. It might be that she felt that in spiritual things there was a great gulf fixed between them, and that it was well to be silent.

Did she know, did she even suspect, how fondly he loved her? He scarcely dared to ask himself the question; still less could he dare to question her. He was so happy in her society, in a release from an intolerable bondage, that he was slow to break the spell. Her calm friendship was more precious than any other woman's love. To live in almost daily communion with that fair soul, to carry her image in his mind, a saintly presence, within whose influence no evil thing could come! This was enough. He shrank from any act which might break the spell. To tell his love, if it were not mutual, might mean a lifelong severance, or at the best an estrangement, a lessening of confidence on her part, a sense of wounded pride on his.

And so the seasons changed, and he was still no more than her lieutenant and fellow-worker, spending most of the days that he could not spend with her in going about her work with Mrs. Bellingham, or with Father Romney.

Lady Mary laughed at his enthusiasm, but was liberal with money help, and sometimes horrified her coachman by driving to Whitechapel, and appearing, a resplendent figure in velvet and ermine, in the ward of a child's hospital, or amongst the squalling chorus of a *crèche*.

"You are really *impayable*," she said. "When I introduced you to Rachel, I expected you to fall over head and ears in love with her, and that we should have had you married at Westminster Abbey at the end of the season."

"At the Abbey, quotha!"

"Why not? Mr. Lorimer could do what he liked with the Dean, for he may be wanted any day to shore up the towers, or needle the Chapter House walls."

"If I were going to marry Rachel Lorimer, I should be

satisfied with a less splendid fane," he said. "The parish church at Goring would be good enough."

"But why have you not arrived at the ring and the church?"

"You forget one obstacle which I mentioned before I saw the lady. She is a great heiress—to say nothing of being the loveliest girl in London—and I am a nobody, with an income which people in the suburbs call a modest competence—meaning enough to pay rent, taxes, and butchers and bakers, at Brixton."

"Rachel does not care about money, nor do her people. If Mrs. Lorimer has a weakness, it is for blue blood."

"Blue blood, indicated by a coronet. A younger son's hereditary caste is not worth much."

"You forget how they worship that girl. To my certain knowledge she refused more than one fine match last season, and that she might now be a marchioness, if she had smiled upon her most ardent admirer. Her mother told me in confidence, so I must name no names. If Rachel cared for you, there would be no difficulty; and you ought to have made her care for you by this time."

"There are other obstacles——"

"What obstacles?"

"More insurmountable, perhaps, than the difference of means. Miss Lorimer is deeply religious—while I——"

"Now, for goodness' sake, don't tell me you pin your faith on Darwin and Huxley——"

"Unhappily, my unbelief is of a cheaper kind. I learnt to doubt before I read Darwin."

"Does Rachel know?"

"We have seldom spoken of spiritual things. Our business has been the corporal works of mercy."

"She must never know; and you must begin going to church to-morrow. There are preachers in London who will soon make you believe, if you go early enough to get a seat at the Sunday morning service."

And then she ran over the names of half a dozen awakening preachers, who were at that time playing upon the emotions of fashionable congregations, divines whose sermons were talked of during church parade, and who were never more appreciated than when they were expatiating

upon modish vices, pride and frivolity, costly dress, and high play, and reminding the best people in London that they were a generation of vipers.

"I am afraid your favourite clerics would leave me cold," Arden said.

"But you won't air your hateful opinions before Rachel?"

"I have never disguised my opinions; and if ever Rachel questions me, she shall find I have at least one Christian virtue—Truth."

Mary Selby returned to the charge more than once, and succeeded in taking her brother to her pet church, where the sheep were divided from the goats, and where he sat among a block of men in the jewelled light of painted windows, and heard a very fine oration—as thick in classical allusions and high-sounding epithets as a court sermon by Jeremy Taylor.

The autumn woods had burned themselves out in every phase of gold, and bronze, and flame-colour; and winter had wrapped the river and hidden the pollard willows and the reedy eyots under a pall of pale mist; and to people who had no romantic love of atmospheric impressions and the æsthetic charms of a landscape in silver and grey, Carlton House Terrace and St. James's Park seemed better than the Upper Thames. At any rate, the big house in the Terrace was alive with fire and lamplight after its autumnal obscurity under brown holland; a nothingness which for a house might seem a foretaste of the inevitable death; the day when it would be said cheerfully, since in a progressive age there are few who care for old things, "Carlton House Terrace is coming down;" coming down to make room for barracks, club, residential flats—who knows? Mutability has become the sign of that city which was once so solid and fixed, the sober London of Charles Lamb and the old India House; where changes were so slow and gradual that people were hardly conscious of change.

Mr. Lorimer was at home again, and at the end of November his dinner-table was spread three or four times a week for the varieties of mankind. Arden was invited often to these friendly dinners, being now an established favourite,

and treated as the familiar house-friend, who is always wanted for some special service, if it be only to secure stalls for a new play, or for a musical recital by a new performer. He sometimes escorted Mrs. Lorimer and her daughter to the theatre. Rachel delighted in good plays, well acted; and her spiritual guides had not taught her to find sinfulness in that form of pleasure.

It was half a year since Arden had seen or heard of Archer Stormont; and he supposed that fiery youth to have spent his later summer camping by the Yukon river, as he had intended. He had been somewhat surprised that his friend had not hunted him out in London, to reiterate his invitation to join in the search for gold; but perhaps that kind of forgetfulness was a natural thing in a man of Stormont's eager temper, and he had no doubt found some more promising comrade for the trip.

"As I never pledged myself to go with him, there is no reason that he should consider himself engaged to me," Arden thought.

There had been a time when he seriously contemplated that pilgrimage to the North-West, when a life of deprivation, danger, and daily toil, had seemed the best chance of dispelling an evil influence; but from the hour he met Rachel Lorimer, his life had changed, the world was transformed, the things of every day were different, and the shadow in which he had dwelt had been lifted, he hoped for ever. No such exile in remote Canadian wilds would be tolerable now, though the thought of the snow-mountains and lonely pine-woods, the cañons and the rushing rapids, perilous encounters with redskins, or friendly powwows with tractable chiefs, and all the adventures of a five-hundred-mile journey over mountain, lake, and river, had once been alluring.

It was a surprise on entering Mrs. Lorimer's drawing-room on All-hallows Eve to hear the familiar Anglo-American accents, and to see Stormont standing in front of the fire in an animated discussion with his host.

"We have a little batch of Americans," Mrs. Lorimer told him. "One of David's casual invitations. Mr. Washington Jamford sent him a letter of introduction this morning from a business acquaintance in Chicago, so David

asked them all to dinner. The young man is a friend only."

"The young man is a Roman acquaintance of mine," said Arden, "and those two nice-looking girls were among the stars in Roman *salons* last winter," he added, glancing at two fair-haired girls, whose frocks were miracles of art in gauze and chiffon, the most expensive and perishable thing that Dover Street could produce. They moved about the room like nymphs or goddesses, in an opalescent cloud, revealing an Andalusian instep in a slipper flashing with Parisian diamonds, and the lady whom they called their Momma watched them admiringly, while conversing with Father Romney, who only on rare occasions was to be found so far West.

"I do consider those frocks are just sweet," she said. "They were only sent home half an hour ago. We are staying at the Cecil, which suits us because it is small and homely."

"We are inclined to think it colossal."

"Ah! you don't know the newest hotels on the other side. They'd be eye-openers for you. I've seen nothing as big here except a Rowton House. I don't know if you admire slim figures. Your English girls are very nice, but they are built too substantial. Sibylla's waist is under eighteen inches in her frock, and Vanessa's is half an inch smaller."

"No doubt there is a charm in such ethereal forms; but I cannot divest myself of the idea of suffering——"

"Suffering! You don't suppose my girls pull in?"

He glanced at Vanessa, standing near the mantelpiece, "chipping in," as she called it, in the talk between Stormont and Mr. Lorimer; and it occurred to him that there was nothing to be pulled in. Vanessa's sylph-like figure seemed an essence of loveliness, rather than corporeal beauty.

"You should see some of our flower-girls," he blurted out, "waists of eight and twenty inches, magnificent creatures, like the Venus of Milo."

"I should be very sorry to see either of my girls with *her* figure," said Mrs. Jamford. "I call her right down clumsy. Now, Miss Lorimer has a neat waist, and is rather a pretty girl."

"She is considered exquisitely lovely," said the priest.

"Ah! that style don't take, in the States. We don't care for the classic form. It's too cold—not *espièg1e* enough. In Chicago we are all for the *espièg1e* in looks and manner. Say, did you ever see any one so serious as Miss Lorimer, sitting like a statue, with her fan in her lap, talking to that young man? In Chicago we have a French ma'amselle who teaches girls how to handle a fan; and how to float about a room, looking at the pictures and bric-à-brac, until they attract somebody to go and talk to them."

"You have advanced ideas in education."

"We're advanced in everything. Push forward! That's what we ought to put on our banners."

"'Plus ultra,' Charles the Fifth's motto."

"I don't know anything about *him*," said Mrs. Jamford, "there's too many Charleses ranging up and down history for me to keep count of them. But you couldn't flummox either of my girls. They know pretty well everything. You should have heard them talk to your English bishop in the Forum, reeling off the names of Roman senators as if they were personal friends."

Father Romney listened with an interested air. He meant to interest Mrs. Jamford by-and-by in his Home of Rest for Women at Walton-on-the-Naze, interest for interest.

"Mother wants you to take Miss Vanessa Jamford in to dinner," Rachel told Arden.

"I shall do as I am bidden. I used to meet the Jamfords in Rome—where they were *bien vus* on the strength of a reputation for millions; but I dare say they have forgotten me. Even my friend Stormont has not discovered me yet."

Stormont dashed across the room to him almost as he spoke.

"My dear fellow, this is jolly! We only came to London a week ago, and I meant to hunt you up the next day; but I had to go about with the girls, to show them where the most expensive milliners and dressmakers are to be found, and where they can pay the most money for cheap jewellery, and to all the picture-galleries, and to the theatre every night."

Rachel had gone to talk to Mrs. Jamford, and Stormont slipped into her empty chair beside Arden.

"What a lovely creature that is! Have you known her long?" he asked.

"About six months. But how is it I find you here? I thought you would be in Klondyke goldfields."

"You think I would go there without doing my level best to take you with me? No, these people stick to me like leeches; and as the old chap promises to finance my expedition, and as the girls are a good sort——"

"Especially Vanessa?"

"Vanessa! Well, isn't she cunning?"

"And where have you been all this time?"

"Oh, fooling round—the Danube, the Tyrol, the Rhine, the Engadine, Como, Maggiore, Verona, Venice; then to Paris, where those girls wanted to see everything—from the Moulin Rouge to the Catacombs. They had heard a lot about modern magic; and they were awfully disappointed at not seeing a Black Mass. It was out of the season, and I couldn't manage it for them."

"My dear Stormont, anything so unspeakably revolting——"

"Yes, that's what they wanted; something unspeakable that they could talk about when they go home. They are as innocent as seraphim and cherubim; but they've had an advanced education, and they want to see everything out of the common."

Dinner was announced, and Arden crossed the room to renew his acquaintance with Vanessa, who was discussing the operations of the Chicago stock-exchange with Mr. Selby, revealing a knowledge of finance generally and "corners" in grain in particular, that filled her host with wonder.

She remembered meeting Arden at the Doria Palace, and expressed herself delighted to see him again.

"You used to take Mr. Stormont for long rambles in the Campagna," she said; "but you mustn't do that kind of thing here. Sister and I are very exacting; and we require every minute of his time."

The two young men resumed their conversation after dinner in the smoking-room.

"I shall leave for Frisco in March," Stormont said, "and

my route will be from there to Juneau in Alaska, where I shall buy stores and outfit, and then travel overland to the Klondyke river. You have no idea what a romantic journey it will be—adventures with Indians, adventures with rapids, adventures with avalanches, adventures with wind-storms, adventures with bears. I'm not quite clear about bears, but there ought to be some," he added thoughtfully.

"Isn't that district rather too near the Arctic ice-fields for the idea of pleasure?"

"Pshaw, my dear fellow, a delightful climate—better than that confounded Engadine, and with something for a fellow to do besides play golf and lawn tennis. Pine-woods, snow-mountains, cañons, lakes; and the chance of a fortune into the bargain. I shall stay two years, if I can stick it—though Vanessa is wild at the idea."

"Vanessa! Has that Delilah shorn your locks?"

"Yes, we're engaged—in an offhand kind of way. She seemed to wish it. I am to have at least three years' liberty, to go where I like, and tame the locomotive devil in my blood. And then we are to be married, and I am to settle in Chicago, which she and her family think a much finer city than even the place they call Pars."

"I congratulate you. She is a lovely creature."

"Pretty enough to put on a mantelpiece; a bit of animated Dresden china; but she's as clever as she can stick; and I believe we shall be ridiculously happy. If I bring anything back from Klondyke, I am to put it into the grain-business; and the old man will make me a partner. And if I come back with empty pockets, I fancy he'll have to do it all the same. He's a snaffle-bit horse when Vanessa drives."

"She is the favourite, I suppose?"

"Oh, he worships them both; but V's the cutest, and he thinks it's a case of heredity. Say, you mean to go with me, don't you?"

"I think not. I have found work in London that suits me, and I don't want to leave it."

"Well, I guess you are looking much fitter than you were in Rome. I never saw a man so run down."

"Shattered nerves. I had been through a time of trouble."

"Shattered nerves, was it? Well, don't let them get

shattered that way again, or you mayn't be able to pick up the bits. You looked as if you had been seeing ghosts."

"There is a ghost in every man's life."

"Confidence for confidence," said Stormont. "I've told you about my engagement. How about you and Lorimer's daughter? Is it a foregone conclusion?"

"No. I am not so distinguished by Fate."

"She's an uncommonly pretty girl. An only child?"

"Yes."

"And I believe Lorimer is one of your single-barrelled millionaires—not the South African twelve-chambered kind—but a very respectable father-in-law."

"If Lorimer were as poor as Job, his daughter would be a prize for a prince; but I do not look so high."

"But you don't want to leave the field open to others?"

"I am contented with my life as it is."

"Well, I hope you'll change your mind before March. There is plenty of time for things to happen. I want you for a pal across the Chilkoot Pass; and you're much fitter for the trip now than you were six months ago."

"Shall you be in London all the winter?"

"Not much! The girls are only here to buy frocks, and see Westminster Abbey, and make a round of the theatres. When they have seen all the plays and done all the music-halls, we shall up stick for Cairo and the Nile, till the end of February. Then I am to bring them back to London, and take them across with me in March, and we shall part company in New York when I go West."

XI.

Among the varied types of humanity that Arden discovered in a world hitherto unknown, that world in which the whole population are strugglers for life, there was one man who stood out from the ruck of men by a certain superiority of will-power and physical force. He was a fine specimen of rough-hewn manhood, six feet two, broad-shouldered, strongly limbed, a man whose back had never bent beneath hard fare and hard work, and who in five and thirty years of life had never known anything, year in, year out, but the daily round of industry, ten hours, eight hours, or fourteen hours, counting overtime, as the case might be. Little wonder, perhaps, that such a man was at heart an anarchist, much wonder that he had never put his revolutionary opinions into action.

He was employed in some iron-works near the East India Docks. His name was Michael Dartnell, generally shortened to Big Mike. He was a splendid worker, and earned good wages. He occupied an airy garret with a view of the river, not far from Stepney Church, in the house where Rachel's favourite widow had her "bit of a place" on the ground floor. He paid the old woman a trifle weekly to clean his room, and these two contrived to maintain a spotless cleanliness amidst surrounding dirt. His dormer window in summer was a bower of climbing nasturtiums, and the fragrance of stocks and mignonette blew into his room from his garden of old packing-boxes on the roof of an outhouse.

Arden met him first in the widow's room, and was impressed by the strong character of the man. Here, as in Konstantin Manville, he saw the maximum of vital energy, a form all muscle and sinew, governed by an indomitable will.

He took note of Big Mike on many occasions, at the Happy Evening entertainments, at awakening services in the incense-clouded church, where Mike was in the choir, rolling out a tremendous basso-baritono voice, always in perfect tune.

Mike was severely sober. He had taken no pledge, declaring that he should be ashamed of himself if he was not able to exercise his own will without any formal act of renunciation.

"When I mean to do a thing, I do it," he said, when a friendly Salvation Army sister tried to pin a blue ribbon on his fustian jacket. "I don't want a bit of ribbon to remind me. I've got a will of my own. I hate the taste of drink; I hate the smell of drink; I hate the name of drink. It's all alike loathsome to me."

His vehemence startled the girl, and she looked at him with a scared expression.

"Ah, you don't know, sister," he muttered between his teeth—"you don't know what reason I have to hate it."

This abstinence of his had kept him in a respectable way, well-fed, well-clad, able to help a friend in difficulties, a subscriber in his humble way to several of Father Romney's institutions, for the last five years. Before that time his history was a blank to the people among whom he lived. He had only come to London five years ago.

Christmas came, and there were high jinks in Father Romney's parish; feasts and pleasures of all kinds for old age and infancy. Those two weak ends of life's thread had the preference; but something was done even for the sturdy and the strong, for men and women in the prime of life, for the valiant mothers, the brave workers. There were tea-parties, snapdragon-parties, more happy evenings; a dramatic performance by amateurs from the West End, whose art was freely criticized by their brothers and sisters in the East; a mighty Christmas-tree, hung with gold and silver toys that glittered and flashed in the light of innumerable candles; and bran-pies on a gigantic scale, stuffed with the things that everybody wanted—boots, aprons, petticoats, flat-irons, teapots, scrubbing-brushes, bars of soap, and baby-clothes. No feature of the festive season had been forgotten; and the plum-puddings distributed at the various

dinners and suppers were voted of a finer quality than had ever smoked upon the board in years gone by. Certainly, in the opinion of the East, whatever other arts might dwindle and decay, plum-pudding-making was on the upward grade.

"It's the biling does it," said one matron. "You can't give a Christmas-pudding too many hours, if you're sure of your pudding-cloth."

"No, Mrs. Rogers, it's the flavouring," said another. "Any fool can bile a pudding."

"And any fool can spile a pudding," interjected Mrs. Rogers.

"But you want a lot of gumption to calculate the spice and the sweet almonds. You didn't ought to be too free with your nutmeg or your cinnamon."

"Nor your almonds neither, if you don't want to poison people with proossic acid," suggested a third. "I don't hold with almonds in a Christmas-pudding; I'm in favour of half a dozen good sound biling-apples, chopped small."

The subject was inexhaustible, and the discussion lasted through the men's after-dinner pipes, till the signal for clearing the tables, preparatory to a dance for the young people.

Rachel appeared in all the festivities, and opened most of the balls. Her influence was paramount everywhere.

"Is it because she is so lovely that all your people seem to worship her?" Arden asked Father Romney.

"No doubt her beauty is a point in her favour. In our ugly environment such a face as hers makes a strong impression, set off by a graceful figure, and the charm of dainty garments, the refinement of manner and carriage—differences and graces which these people feel without knowing why. I have seen our girls sit gazing at her open-mouthed in admiring wonder, and, after contemplating her neat little hat and exquisite hair, turn a look of disgust upon the Gainsborough monstrosities and bushy fringes of their pals. I have even seen an improvement in the style of some among them."

Big Mike made himself useful in the Christmas preparations, carried the tree from the nurseryman's van to the schoolroom, and helped to tie on the many-coloured candles;

His broad thick hands had a wonderful dexterity in doing work that would seem to demand the touch of delicate fingers. His good-nature was inexhaustible; but he was of a serious temper, and his smile was of the rarest. He had a curious gentleness of speech and manner in addressing young women, and was always ready to do them any service; but, for the rest, held himself aloof from them, and Arden had never seen him engaged in the slightest flirtation with the sex. His face assumed a peculiar gravity when he talked to a woman, most of all if she were a notorious sinner.

Arden questioned Father Romney about the man.

"He interests me more than any of your people," he said. "He has the air of a man with a history."

"He has a history, and a tragic one," said the priest, gravely. And as he said no more, Arden did not question him.

Father Romney resumed, after a thoughtful pause, "For me Michael Dartnell is a pearl of price. He has done more to help me with my rescue work and my temperance work than any one in the parish. You remember how Samuel Johnson carried the lost girl to the shelter of his lodgings. Mike has carried many an outcast in those strong arms of his, in the small hours, when the snow was driving through the empty streets, or the rain flooding the gutters. They would listen to him when they wouldn't listen to my women-helpers."

"And he has fought against the drink-devil?"

"His own sober life has been better than a sermon, and he has fought might and main. He has stopped men and women on their way to the great flaring tavern, to the warmth and the light and the company that lure them to ruin and death. He has argued with them, wrestled with them, carried them off to the coffee palace, sat out the evening with them, and in many cases he has prevailed against Satan. If I had fifty such workers, I might have a sober parish."

Michael was not inclined to make friendships. He bore himself with a somewhat surly manner to his social superiors, except in the case of Miss Lorimer, whom he worshipped. It took Arden some time to get on really friendly terms

with him, for the man had a horror of being patronized, and scented patronage in any civility from the upper classes; the "idle classes," as he called them, with a large disdain for any work that was not manual labour, the exercise of thews and sinews. He had weighed and measured the journalists, and authors, and *dilettanti*, who had come to the East End to look at him, very much as they would go to the Zoo on the arrival of a rare animal; and he considered them poor creatures, undeserving of the bread they ate. He had the socialist's Utopia in his mind, a world in which everybody would work, and nobody would be rich—a neutral-coloured world in which there would be no idleness and over-feeding, and no penury and hunger.

He had turned his rough side towards Arden in all their earlier encounters, had met every attempt at friendly conversation with grimness and sneers; but by degrees he began to see that this particular member of the aristocracy was sincere in his desire to get at the heart and mind of a working man, sincere in his reverence for honest labour, a true follower of that splendid gospel which Thomas Carlyle gave the world—the gospel of plain living and high thinking, the gospel of unflinching work.

Michael was fond of reading, and the books he liked were of a solid order—Mill, Carlyle, Darwin, and Spencer. Reading with him was not a recreation, but a serious pursuit. He read slowly and studiously, plodding his way through a book, page by page and line by line, and never leaving it till he had mastered the author's meaning. Milton and Shakespeare he loved; but light literature had no charm for him. He did not want to dip and skip, or open a volume haphazard and read wherever his eye lighted. He was not an epicurean nibbler, and for him a book did not mean casual refreshment; it meant a substantial meal. He had spent a year over "The Origin of Species" and "The Descent of Man." He read *Hamlet* or *Lear* as intently as a cultured person would read a treatise on Quaternions. "Sartor Resartus" he knew by heart. He had ploughed through Mill's "Logic," and "The Principles of Political Economy;" and Spencer's "Sociology" was almost the lightest book on the deal shelf of his own fashioning which contained his modest library.

Arden had heard and read of such men; but he had never been in touch with one till now, and he thoroughly enjoyed a friendly argument with Michael Dartnell. He invited the man to spend an evening with him in Jermyn Street, and Michael turned out the pink of neatness in his Sunday suit of dark-grey tweed, having had the good taste to eschew funereal broadcloth for his best wear. He was quite at his ease in Arden's handsome library, and the Persian carpet and the artistic reading-lamp made no apparent effect upon him; but he walked round the room admiring the books, and wondering at their number.

"You don't mean that you've read them all, Mr. Arden?" he said.

Mike never called any man "sir," not even his employer.

"I've looked into most of them, and I've read some of them a good many times; but if I were to pretend I had read them all as conscientiously as you read Darwin, I should be a base impostor."

"Ah, that kind of reading comes of having only a few books. I put sixpence a week into a little tin box, till it comes to the price of the book I want most, and then I buy the book; and as I'm a slow reader, the sixpences have mounted up by the time I've finished it, and I've got the price of my next fancy in hand."

"I believe yours is the right way, Mike, *non multa, sed multum*. And then what a world you have to choose from! With your way of reading, every book read is a lasting possession; while for the skimmer and the dipper, alas! what a fleeting joy reading is! what hazy memories the most precious books leave behind!"

From literature the discussion moved to actual things, and Mike enlarged upon his socialistic Utopia, in which there was to be no Upper House, and no Lords to occupy it, all rank and title having been swept clean off the face of Great Britain, all royalty having become a tradition. Arden heard him talk, but listened as to a child's idea of life and the world, when he tells the gardener he will give him a golden palace, and a coach and eight, so soon as he, the child, is grown up.

"It will all come, Mr. Arden; it is only a question of time."

"Time can work wonders: but I think we are likely to reach that igneous gulf in the constellation of Hercules, towards which astronomers tell us our solar system is moving, before we arrive at your ideal republic."

Michael shook his head gravely as he sipped his coffee and trifled with some delicate sandwiches, a light refreshment which Arden had ordered for his guest. To his mind, Arden was in the condition of that unawakened aristocracy at Versailles, who danced so lightly over the crust of the earth, while the lava-flood of a hungry populace was seething under their feet. Some day, soon or late, the revolution would come; the wild women, the bloodthirsty men, would smash the windows and break in the doors in Grosvenor Square and Park Lane; the dukes, the millionaires, the beauties, the wits, all those who had turned a deaf ear and an unseeing eye upon the miseries of mankind, would be flung upon the great waste-heap of old abuses, unfair privileges, and unjust preferences; the earth would roll round to a new tune in a golden age of universal labour, every man fulfilling the primeval curse and eating his bread in the sweat of his brow; but labour would be regulated by the laws of health and happiness, each man contributing his fair share to the sum of common industry, and each man enjoying equal opportunities for rest and pleasure; while all surplus wealth, over and above the daily needs of the multitude, would be devoted to institutions for the common benefit.

"The good things that are done by individual benevolence, and which are but drops in the ocean of mankind's necessities, would then be done by the State, and on a plan wide enough to provide for everybody's need and everybody's pleasure," said Michael, delighted to expound his theories. "All the simple natural joys of life would be paid for by the surplus now locked in the money-chests of millionaires. The beauty of this earth would no longer be a luxury for the rich, something for them to come to the East End and tell us about condescendingly. Everybody would be able to enjoy the delight of the earth; for one of our institutions would provide expenses on a humble scale for the young people of both sexes to travel over the face of the globe, to a greater or less extent, according to their capacity, to tramp

from city to city, over mountain passes, through forests, across deserts, with just enough money in their wallet to buy their daily bread. Then, instead of the privileged few moving in sleeping-waggons and restaurant-cars from one luxurious hotel to another still more luxurious, there will be multitudes of happy young people trudging about the Continent like Oliver Goldsmith, making friends with townsfolk and villagers, learning foreign languages, and shaking off British prejudices."

"All this will happen in your Utopia?"

"More than this will happen in my Utopia. The children will be fed and cared for by the State; for the children are the future. The old will be pensioned and made comfortable, their maintenance being, next to childhood, the strongest claim on the State."

"And art, the drama, literature, how will they flourish, do you think, in a State where no one is rich enough to buy a picture?"

"The State will buy pictures; the State will maintain theatres. The worship of money will be ended, for there will be no quadruple millionaires for sycophants to crawl and grovel before, battening upon their ostentatious feasts, and envying and reviling them. Nobody will be rich; but everybody will be able to enjoy life. The drink-scourge will be banished; for the destitution which finds relief in drunkenness will have ceased to be."

"Utopian, Utopian to the fortieth power," said Arden, smilingly. "A pleasant dream. Some amelioration there will be, I believe, with the progress of education, the refining power of educated thought. But your Utopia, where no one is hungry and every one has the chance of happiness, where the smart hotels and the gambling-rooms at Monte Carlo will be a habitation for the owl and badger, where all the Pullman cars will be broken up and there will be only one class, at a farthing a mile, upon the government railways, where the cheap bicycle will have superseded the horse, and the tramcar will be the only carriage—— No, Michael. I do not believe in quite such an England as your imagination has conceived; no—not even in the distant future."

"I am sorry you are satisfied with a state in which old-age pensions are voted impracticable, and a single meal a day for

board-school children demoralizing, if not impossible ; where millions are expended to enforce education upon empty stomachs, and the additional million for food is withheld."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, and Dartnell rose and bade his host good night. He would have liked to stop much later ; but the instinct of the fitness of things was strong in his rough-hewn nature, and he knew when to go.

Christmas and New Year festivities were over and done with. The old people wondered if they would live to see another Christmas ; the young people began to think of Easter and the first bank-holiday of the year, the year that was still in its infancy, an infancy as tetchy and wayward as that of crook-backed Duke Richard.

It was a winter that made most people low-spirited and captious ; and during a cold and cheerless February the only brightness in Arden's life was to be found in Carlton House Terrace, where he was asked to dinner two or three times a week, one invitation following on the heels of another in Lorimer's hearty casual way.

"If he knew that I love his daughter, he would hardly be so hospitable," thought Arden. "I have no doubt he has set his heart upon her making a great match. Some day there will appear a duke or a marquis to her liking ; and her heart will awaken like the heart of the sleeping princess, and she will ride away with him to his ancestral castle, 'in that new world which is the old.' Lorimer's friendliness is a proof of my insignificance. To his mind, I am not in the running. I am only a harmless detrimental."

It seemed to him inevitable that a *parvenu* like Lorimer, however large-minded, would wish his daughter to make what the world calls a brilliant match ; and he was surprised and touched when the prosperous man opened his heart to him, they two sitting together in the smoking-room, after the guest of the evening had departed, a South American premier, whose conversation rarely travelled north of the Nicaraguan canal, an interesting man from the Royal Geographical Society point of view, but somewhat boring to Lady Mary Selby, whom he had taken in to dinner.

"I hope you know how grateful I am to you for helping my daughter in her philanthropic work," Lorimer said gravely. "She tells me you are a tower of strength in the East End, a kind of suffragan to Father Romney."

"She places my poor services far too high. I have enjoyed the work."

"It was new to you, I fancy. You hadn't done any slumming before?"

"No; it was the opening up of a new world."

"Well, you know our system—the wife's and mine—with our only child. We made up our minds about it when she was a baby. We would never thwart her; so that if God were to take away the blessing He gave us, we might, at least, in our desolation, be able to look back and say, 'She grew up in perfect liberty, as free and as beautiful as a hedgerow flower.' We knew somehow that she would never desire any evil thing, that all her impulses and instincts would be noble and true, that she would grow always straight up towards the skies; and we were not disappointed. So when she came under Mrs. Bellingham's influence, and took up the cause of toilers and strugglers, and sinners and outcasts, as the chief business of her life, we did not complain. It was a blow all the same, for you see their gain was our loss. We would have liked her to go everywhere with us, to shine in society, and to marry young; so that we might see our grandchildren growing up, before our time came to blow out the candle and say good night."

"She is very young still. There is time enough for her to realize all your hopes."

"Perhaps; if she meets a man she can love. But I doubt if she will ever care for any man who is not willing to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and devote his life to the kind of work she lives for. And there are not many such men—though there are plenty of oily hypocrites who would pretend anything, I dare say, to catch such a wife. But she would not be taken in by that sort."

"And would you be satisfied if she were to make such a marriage: choose a husband who had no worldly advantages to offer her, who was greatly her inferior in worldly wealth?"

"Worldly wealth need not count for much where Rachel is concerned. A girl who thinks it a sin to spend money on hot-house strawberries while there are needlewomen living on eight shillings a week, wouldn't be likely to let her husband squander her fortune on a racing-stable at Newmarket, or *trente-et-quarante* at Monte Carlo. The man who marries my girl must make up his mind to do without most of the amusements and indulgences that are a necessity of existence to the modern young man. Cards, sport, society, all must be a dead letter for him—at least while Rachel thinks as she does now. The world changes, and my daughter may change as time goes on. Her sons and daughters may teach her to take pleasure in common things, and in her own home. Who knows?"

"I cannot imagine her other than she is—an angel of pity."

"True; but she may find other means of doing good; she may sacrifice something less of her own life. When she began the work, I gave her *carte blanche* as to money; but I did not think that hussies and brats in the East End would have the first call upon my daughter. No more did her mother. But we stick to our old rule of not thwarting her; and we know that if we don't have half, or even a quarter of her life, we have her love."

XII.

That confidential talk with David Lorimer set Arden's heart on fire. For some time past he had lived upon the hope that Rachel was not indifferent to him, that their daily companionship was almost as dear to her as it was to him. In her frank friendliness, in the kindly greeting of every day, there had been something, perhaps, to discourage; but there had been thrilling moments for him in which some sign of feeling, too subtle to be translated into words, had told him that he was more than a friend, and that her heart-beats answered to the intenser feeling that made him suddenly incapable of replying to some commonplace question with a commonplace reply. Few engaged lovers had ever been more in each other's company than these two who were nominally friends. They had tramped the long monotonous streets together, threaded darksome alleys, mounted squalid staircases, fed the little children, and comforted the sick, watched by the bed of death, entered heart and soul into the lives that were so remote from their own in every circumstance, from the cradle to the grave. They had taken counsel together as to the help that was to be given, and the best manner of giving it; and gradually, as Arden became familiar with the people, penetrated all their mysteries, and weighed them in the scale of a sound logical mind, she came to regard him as an oracle, and to submit every question to his decision. Hooligans were reclaimed and taught an industry; emigrants were sent out into new worlds; wretched women were provided for, at his advice; and Father Romney, previously paramount, was content to take the second place. The priest had no doubt as to Rachel's feelings, and watched Arden with keen attention, questioning whether he were worthy of so rich a prize; for

though he had been indefatigable in works of charity, he had rarely been seen in the church, and Father Romney feared that there was something wanting. He discussed the situation confidentially with Mrs. Bellingham one winter night, walking westward with her in search of a cab, after one of his Happy Evenings.

"I don't think Miss Lorimer would marry an unbeliever," he said, after a silence, and with no reference to their previous talk.

"I don't think she would. But what led you to say that?"

"Isn't it easy for you to guess? Her friendship with Mr. Arden seems likely to lead to an engagement; and it would grieve me more than I can say to see her marry a man who was not a Christian."

"Do you suspect Walter Arden of not being a Christian, after all his goodness to your people?"

"Oh, that is no criterion. Some of the men who have helped me most have been outside the pale in religious matters, men who have thought it a stringent duty to brighten the lot of the wretched ones of this earth because, in their barren creed, there is nothing to come after; no counterbalance for sufferings patiently endured; no reward for humble virtues, self-sacrifice, the ineffable charities of the poor to the poor; nothing but darkness and the grave. Arden reminds me of those men. He is lavish of time, pains, and money; but he has never knelt at our altar or shown any interest in our services, or our guilds, or our religious offices of any kind."

"It may be as you think," Mrs. Bellingham answered quietly, "but he is young enough to change his opinions. We all know the restless spirit of youth, and how many phases of faith and unfaith a mind may suffer before it settles down into passive acceptance of orthodox doctrines. I should not be afraid to see Rachel Lorimer marry a man of noble heart and intellect, even though his views of religion were unsound."

Father Romney had hailed a crawling cab, so there was no time to continue the argument on this occasion.

Arden had a staunch friend in Mrs. Bellingham, who was on very confidential terms with Rachel's father and mother,

and who knew that their most earnest wish was to see their daughter happily married to a good man. She knew that they had renounced all ambitious views, after their disappointment of the previous year, and that in the fear of seeing Rachel enrol herself in some Anglican sisterhood, a spinster by profession, if not a nun, they would be contented with a very modest alliance.

A marriage with Lord Wildernsea's youngest brother would satisfy Mrs. Lorimer's aspiration for blue blood, while his lack of wealth would matter nothing to Rachel, whose vision of the Christian life was to live plainly, and devote her surplus means to works of charity. To Mrs. Bellingham it seemed that such a marriage would be an ideal union—the veritable marriage of true minds.

There was a breath of spring in the land in the early days of March, and the flower-sellers' baskets were bright with daffodils and mimosa, golden yellow in the sunshine, as Arden walked from Jermyn Street to Bedford Square. Mrs. Bellingham's sitting-room was dazzling, great brown bowls of daffodils on tables, yellow tulips, mimosa, violets, hyacinths. Flowers were her only extravagance, in a house where the solid and somewhat sombre furniture had not been changed since her marriage, five and thirty years before, to a physician and specialist of some renown. She had been nearly twenty years a widow; but she loved the spacious old house in which her happy married life had been spent, and would hardly have changed it for what the auctioneers call "a bijou residence" in Mayfair or Belgravia. She even liked that busy unbeautiful central London, which many people consider detestable; the London of the workers, the great middle-class, for whom London means both a livelihood and a settled home; not a pleasure-place for a three-months' season, not merely a few choice streets of expensive shops, in which to buy finery three or four times a year, passing through between Scotland and the Riviera.

Arden called this afternoon in response to a letter in which Mrs. Bellingham had expressed her wish to see him, in order to talk over the case of two young men who were going to Canada, men who had done badly in London, but

whose physique and moral character promised well for their success in a more primitive mode of life.

Mrs. Bellingham was out, but the maidservant told him that she was sure to be home before five o'clock; and on this assurance he waited in the quiet sitting-room, where the London noises were limited to the far-off rumble of wheels, and the droning of an organ in a side street.

The afternoon sun was shining upon the wintry London garden, the little avenue of pollarded limes, the aucubas with their bright red berries, and a row of Irish yews, like miniature obelisks. The dark verdure, the leafless limes, looked almost gay in that clear light, and the London sky was a wonderful blue, swept clean by the west wind. The feeling of spring was in the land, that feeling of pleasure mixed with a vague sadness—half hope, half fear; as if heart and mind were awakening from a dreamless winter sleep, to the uncertainties and apprehensions of life.

Arden stood at an open window, too deep in thought to hear the chirping of metropolitan birds, or the distant drone of an organ, dismally grinding "The Village Blacksmith."

He had met Stormont in the street that afternoon, fresh from Cairo, full of high spirits and uncontrollable energy; and again the pilgrimage to the Yukon river had been urged upon him. Stormont was to start in less than a week. He had found a pal, a schoolfellow, a young doctor with an Edinburgh degree, clever, enterprising, and not obliged to earn his daily bread by putting up a brass plate in a new neighbourhood, to wait for a run of luck in street accidents and local epidemics.

"If you would join us, we should be a jolly little party," said Stormont. "Alick Mackenzie is a splendid fellow, capital company, and as hard as iron. You haven't his stamina, but you've plenty of grit, and the tramp from Juneau to the Stewart river will harden you. Why, you won't know yourself after two or three years roughing it out yonder."

"When do you start?"

"In the *Baltimore*, from Southampton, next Saturday. I am personally conducting my people as far as New York, where I bid them good-bye; but Vanessa and I hope it will not be good-bye for ever."

"Poor little Vanessa, so shrewd and so pretty! I wonder you don't make up your mind to stay in Chicago, and settle down as a quiet citizen."

"I almost wish I could; but there's some quicksilver in my veins that must be used up before I can enjoy domestic happiness, my own fireside, slippers, and an easy-chair. I believe the homing instinct will be developed in time, if I keep going for two or three years more."

"A long engagement, and the lovers at different extremities of a continent! Isn't that rather hard lines for Vanessa?"

"Not a bit of it. She's going to do her full share of flirting while we're parted, and give herself a real good time. Do you suppose there's no quicksilver in *her* veins? I sometimes think there's nothing but quicksilver. It'll take her some time to arrive at the slipper and easy-chair stage. But I calculate you'll see us a regular Darby and Joan in the new century. Well now, Arden, will you be number three?"

"I don't think so, in my present frame of mind—but something might happen—even in a few days—and I might be glad to cast in my lot with you."

"You say you might be glad, and your countenance assumes a look of despair. Glad or sorry, we'll take you—even at the last moment. I am at the Savoy with the Jamfords. They asked me to find them a cosy little hotel, where they would feel as if they were in their own parlour. They have a suite of rooms on the third floor looking on the river, and they like it better than Danieli's and the view over the water to San Giorgio. They have a poor opinion of Venice."

And now Walter Arden was looking up at the blue sky, and wondering which way his road of life was going to turn within the next five days. It was no question of a choice of roads; for the one road by which he wanted to travel was that which Rachel and he would tread hand-in-hand from the altar to the grave.

But if his case were hopeless, if the civilized world, the faces of the men and women he knew, the occupations of his daily life, even the books he had loved, were to become dust and ashes, why then that unknown land

near the Arctic region, whose hardships and perils Stormont talked of so glibly, might be the best refuge for a broken life.

"Daily toil, daily struggles, daily dangers—no time for thought, no time for memory."

He meant to put his fate to the touch, to know if he were to be happy or miserable. He could hardly imagine life without that pure presence which had rescued him from unspeakable horror. He had come to take a common-sense view of his case, and he now considered all that he had suffered after Manville's death, the nameless indescribable torture of his days and nights, the bewildering sense of a being that was not himself always near him, as a mental condition, a malady of the nerves such as he had often heard of in other men. Rachel's influence had worked a cure that might have seemed supernatural to any one but a determined sceptic; but the bent of his mind was opposed to all belief in the *au delà*, the something beyond earth, and outside the iron laws of human reason.

He had never forgotten the strange foreshadowing of Rachel in Douglas Campbell's letter—the spiritualist's prophecy that his release was to come from the influence of some pure and holy spirit, the bright, white light of innocence and piety.

By an accident of life, Campbell's forecast had been curiously fulfilled. Rachel Lorimer's influence had dispelled the darkness of a troubled mind. He had entered upon a new phase of existence, had learnt to spend his life and his thoughts for others, and to taste the ineffable joy of making the wretched happy. In his companionless childhood and his independent youth, he had been seldom called upon for any act of self-sacrifice; and, without becoming selfish, he had been at least indifferent to the fate of others. Mrs. Berry's appeal to him to save her daughter had been the first stringent call upon his duty to mankind. Till that hour he had gone his own way, and let the rest of the human race go theirs. Rachel was the bright, white light that Campbell had prophesied. Rachel was all the world to him; and without her this earth would seem a world of iron and gloom.

Since that conversation with David Lorimer, which

seemed to sanction and almost to invite a declaration, he had delayed the fateful moment from day to day.

"If I ask her to be my wife and she refuses, we can never again be what we have been? In failing to win her love, I shall lose her for ever."

Rachel's image so filled his thoughts this sunlit afternoon, as he stood by the open window in Mrs. Bellingham's library, looking across the garden to the Museum walls, that, although he had no reason to hope for her coming, it was scarcely a surprise when the door opened behind him and the light step he knew sounded on the oak floor.

A wave of happiness rose within him as he turned and met her with outstretched hands.

"Rachel!"

The name came unawares, and only her vivid blush reminded him that he had gone beyond his right.

"I did not think I should see you here this afternoon."

"Oh, I am here very often. I cannot get on long without Aunt Belle. She is such a wonderful person. She has all the threads of all our schemes at her fingers' ends. She never forgets anything—names, places, needs, troubles, hopes, plans, they are all inscribed on the tablet of her mind. It is the largest mind I know."

"Not larger than your father's?"

"Perhaps not; but his mind is full of things, hers is full of people, human interests."

"Doesn't humanity come into the scheme of the great contractor, who employs men by the thousand?"

"So many that they are unknown multitudes. They have no individual existence for him. They think and move in a block. They don't care about his interests. When they strike they don't mind if he is to be ruined. He pays them well, and does not work them too hard; if one of the thousands is killed, he pensions the widow and children; but he can do very little for individuals. There is no room for kind thoughts and sympathy. A multitude is only a human machine."

"Ah, I see, sympathy and love can only move in a narrow radius, like the village of Bethany."

"True; but when everybody is sympathetic, the edges of

those narrow circles will touch—and no living creature will be friendless."

She spoke with a subdued enthusiasm that shone in her countenance like a light. She loved to talk of these things; and she talked more freely with Arden than she had ever talked with any one except Mrs. Bellingham. She had no disturbing sensitiveness, no apprehension of ridicule when she was with him; and in her perfect confidence, in the evident pleasure she took in telling him her ideas and her hopes, he saw the promise of her love.

He brought a chair to the window for her. The air was mild enough to admit of an open window, though the westering sun that touched the roof of the Museum with gold did not warm Mrs. Bellingham's library.

"What have you been doing all day?" he asked, when she was seated.

"I spent an hour or two in the children's hospital, St. Helena's; and then I went for a little round among my old women. There are two of them who remind me of the saints I have read about in the old, old histories, such patience, and such a complete renunciation of all the pleasures and comforts of life."

"They are like the fox in the fable, poor souls! They renounce the unattainable."

"Ah, but to be cheerful in self-abnegation, not to be angry or distrustful. To have tasted none of the gladness of life—not even humdrum comfort—and yet after seventy years to be able to say God is good."

"Religion, as Father Romney and his like administer it, is a grand hypnotizer."

He caught her shocked look, and his cheek flushed at the thought of having offended her; and yet he could not curb his tongue, or pretend; not even though her approval meant life.

He drew a chair near hers and seated himself. There was nothing embarrassing for her in finding herself alone with him. They had been so often alone together in divers places and at divers seasons; and if she knew that he loved her, she had no fear of his love.

"I met Archer Stormont on my way here," he said, after a pause, "and he told me that he is to start for New York next Saturday."

"The first stage of his journey to Alaska. What an adventurous person he is!"

"He wants me to go with him, as a fellow-adventurer."

Her startled look and loss of colour thrilled him with a wild joy.

"She cares, she cares, she cares!" he thought. "She is mine!"

His heart swelled with rapture. All that was needed was her love. All other circumstances were in his favour.

"And do you think of going?" she asked.

"I have been thinking about it seriously—very seriously."

"I am sorry you are tired of doing good. You have made so many poor creatures fond of you—and you will turn your back upon them—forsake them—forget them perhaps—for a whim."

Her cheeks were flushed now, and there were tears in her eyes, half sorrow, half indignation.

"Not for a whim, Rachel, not for any light reason. If I go to Klondyke, I shall carry with me a broken life, a despairing heart."

"I don't understand," she faltered, brushing away her sudden tears with a hand that shook a little as it groped for the handkerchief in her jacket-pocket.

"Whether I go or stay rests with you. It is for you to decide. You know, you must know, that I love you. How could it be otherwise? You have let me be your friend, your almost daily companion; you have been so sweetly frank, so divinely trustful; you have let me read your lovely mind like an open book. You have given me the most exquisite happiness my life has ever known, the only perfect happiness. You could not guess that I loved you from the hour of our first meeting, from our first hour of light casual talk at the Selbys' table. You could not know that; but you must know now, you must have discovered ever so long ago, how dearly, how deeply, I love you."

He tried to take her hand, but she withdrew it, and looked at him gravely, sorrowfully even.

"I have thought sometimes—lately—that you cared for me—that our happy friendship was coming to an end," she said slowly.

"Only to blossom into love. Friendship was the gradual growth of the plant—love is the glorious flower."

"Pray, pray don't talk so wildly. I wanted our friendship to last——"

"Because love was impossible—on your part? Is that what you mean?"

"Not quite—not quite that."

"But you look upon my love as a calamity—something that ought never to have been."

"Something that cannot bring us happiness, if there is an impassable gulf between us."

"What gulf? Why impassable? When first I met you I thought that riches—the god of this age—would hold us apart. But now, knowing what your life is, I know for how little worldly possessions count with you; and that all you would ask from a husband would be liberty to devote your fortune to good works. I want no share in your wealth, Rachel. I want you, and you alone; and I have reason to think that if you loved me there would be no difficulties to overcome, and that I should be acceptable to your father and mother."

"Yes, I know, I know how highly my father thinks of you," she answered quickly; "but even that can make no difference to me if your thoughts of God and the world to come are as far from my thoughts as I fear they are. If I loved you ever so dearly," she went on, in a lower voice, that faltered a little, while her hands were clasped, with nervous fingers interlaced, "if I loved you as dearly as ever a wife loved her husband, how could I marry you, how could I promise to honour and obey a man whose opinions fill me with horror? No, no; it could never be. I have valued your friendship more and more as the days have gone by; but I knew from the first that we could never be more than friends."

"And when you gave me the inestimable bliss of your companionship, when you let me follow you and adore you——"

"Oh no, no; there was no word of love."

"Was my adoration less obvious because it was silent? You must have known, Rachel, no woman could have helped knowing, how deeply you were beloved."

"I may have thought sometimes——" she faltered, the delicate hands working convulsively, and her eyes brimming with tears.

"You knew, you knew," he repeated passionately, "and you let me love you! You never reckoned with my fond hopes, my dreams of a happy life, my disappointment, my broken heart. And now you tell me that we can be nothing to each other——"

"No, no; friends always, the truest, the dearest."

"Men have not those half-measures. With us it is all or nothing. Friendship is the stone which a woman offers to the man who asks her for bread. If you do not love me, if you will not accept my love, all is over between us. When I go out of that door, I shall go out a stranger to the rest of your life—loving your memory to my last breath, but never daring to see you again. We have been closer friends than most lovers, have had better opportunities of sounding the depths of each other's minds, have been associated as even husbands and wives are seldom associated, thinking the same thoughts, sorrowing and rejoicing for the same things; and can you dismiss me, me whom you know as an honest man, your faithful ally in good works, penetrated as you yourself are with an illimitable ardour in the cause of suffering humanity; can you say I am to have no part in your life, no recompense from your love, because we differ in our opinions? Will you dismiss me upon a question of metaphysics?—my estimate of things unknowable and unthinkable—a question which every man has the right to answer according to the light that is in him, and to keep the answer locked in his own mind."

"Yes, I know that is your way of thinking; but it never, never, never could be mine. If I did not believe in God and Christ, in the life after death, in the recompense of the just and the punishment of the wicked, this world and its sufferings, its cruelties, its injustice, would be such a horrible wilderness, such an intolerable puzzle, that I should want to turn my face to the wall and despair and die."

"What, while you can fight in the battle against Apollyon, help in the sacred cause of progress? Why, every woman who lives as you do is a link in the chain of betterment. Rachel, Rachel, be reasonable! As I live I will never try

to shake your faith, for to me your faith is sacred and beautiful."

"You would not try! No! But you might influence me against my own will. You are so much cleverer than I am, have read more, and thought more. How could I help being influenced by you? And when I looked forward to the life after death—the life in which I believe those who love each other here will be reunited in a deathless happiness—when I looked forward and remembered that for you that hereafter was a foolish dream, that when you refrained from ridicule of my hopes, my creed, the church in which I prayed, the altar before which I knelt, you were only humouring me as you would humour a child that believed in fairyland. How could I bear it? How could I be steadfast and unwavering, against such an influence? No, no, no, Walter, I cannot hazard my immortal soul!"

She had risen in her agitation, and was standing by the open window, where the air blew colder as the light faded. She was deadly pale, and her tears were streaming unheeded.

"Rachel!" he cried vehemently, snatching her in his arms, holding her and looking down at her with passionate love. "Rachel, Rachel, make me happy, and leave the future in the lap of Fate! What does it all matter, all the world of thought and speculation, all the creeds and all the dreams of men, compared with the bliss of two hearts that are as one, two lives merged in each other in the ecstasy of love? All I know, all you can know, of life is that its highest and best and purest and truest is love, the love that beats in your breast now, like a scared bird, the love that answers throb for throb to mine. No, no; let me keep you, dear," as she tried to break away from him; "let me hold you to my heart this once, if never, never, never again. I will not even kiss those pale lips—but I must speak; I must make my protest against a woman's folly. I cannot see those tears, and not believe that you love me. You love me, and we have our lives in our own hands. There is nothing, nothing but your will that can hinder our happiness. And, oh, my dearest girl, is not this little life enough for us to consider while we are here? Is not love enough, earthly love made holy by high and pure hopes, love unselfish, love unsensual, love divine?"

He released her from his arms; and she began to pace the room slowly, drying her tears, deep in thought.

"If there were any hope that you would change," she said, "if you were likely ever to think——"

She broke off falteringly, looking at him with a despairing earnestness.

"If I were likely to think as you and Father Romney think—to believe in the efficacy of long prayers and elaborate ritual, to accept the assurance of supernatural things that war against my common sense? No, Rachel, I do not believe that I shall ever come to that pass—not in the health and vigour of my mind. I foresee no possibility of such a change in me. I cannot lie to you. I cannot play the hypocrite, and say that my love for you might make a convert of me, might lead me to see with your eyes, and think with your mind. But if in all that concerns this world, this life that has to be lived here, the only certain life, we think alike, and mean to act alike; if there is no sacrifice you can ask of pleasure or comfort that I would not willingly yield; no toil and trouble that I would not take, for you and those you care for; surely there is promise of happiness for us both, and our different views of the dim and unknown future need not come between us and that perfect life of wedded love which is Nature's best gift to her children."

"I dare not hazard my immortal soul!" she said, wringing her hands, as she paced the room, while Arden stood like a rock, watching her, loving her, admiring her in her pale beauty, tall and slender as a lily, sheathed in the straight folds of her green cloth gown, the fair throat and face and pale brown hair the flower that crowned the folded leaves.

Could so gentle, so delicate a creature, be adamant when her own heart urged surrender? He could not doubt that she loved him. Her agitation was too intense for anything except a despairing love.

"Rachel, there need be no hazard. Why should you fear? You, whose faith is firm and steadfast."

"Is my faith firm? Who knows? I have never thought of spiritual things too deeply. I have never questioned the creed that I was taught in my childhood. I have grown up

believing, and happy in my belief. But if I were your wife, if I were thinking day by day about you, deploring your want of faith, arguing with you, trying to change you, only to be defeated by your stronger intellect—who knows whether I could remain steadfast, whether I too might not begin to question those divine truths which no man can demonstrate or prove, which we are taught to receive as children, unquestioning, obedient? No, no, no; I will not hazard my belief in God and Christ. That is my most sacred possession. I will not risk my hope of heaven for any dream of happiness on earth. I can be happy in another way, happy as women are in holy sisterhoods, bending their minds to the yoke, patient in self-surrender."

"Rachel," he exclaimed, and the exclamation sounded like a cry of pain, "for pity's sake do not think of that melancholy fate—for you, for you in your youth and beauty! If you will not be my wife, at least be true to your mission upon earth, and make a better man's life happy. Dearly as I love you, I would rather think of you in years to come as a happy wife, than as a mock nun, subordinate perhaps to women of inferior intellect, obeying where Nature meant you to command. I could not endure the thought of such a sacrifice."

"It is not likely to happen, perhaps, for it would distress my father and mother, and their happiness must come before my own."

"That is well. I know what your father wishes. He was good enough to confide in me. He wants to see his daughter happily married—to see her children at his knees, when his days decline. Rachel, if you will trust your life, your creed, your plan of existence to me, I will pledge myself never to trouble your ideas of the spirit-world, always to respect your views, to keep my doubts locked in my own mind, so that you shall forget that I am less than a believing Christian. Is that so great a risk to run? At least you know the worst of me. Might there not be a greater hazard in marrying a man of exalted piety, whose exaggerated faith might make shipwreck afterwards?"

"I am not likely to run *that* hazard either," she answered. "Oh, you do not know what my faith is to me—how much of my life it means. Think when I go amongst those poor

women—those ill-used wives, those wretched mothers whose children have gone down into an abyss of infamy, those lost girls whose youth has been ruined by sin—what could I say to them, how could I comfort them, how speak to them of hope, if I could not assure them of God's justice, and of Christ's divine pity? If my faith faltered, if I were half-hearted, spoke only with the lips, what good could I do them? The Gospel has been my strong rock; and I dare not marry an unbeliever."

"And for my desolate life, for my broken heart, you have no mercy?"

"Men's hearts are not easily broken. You will go back into the busy world. You will have your career. I shall hear of you as distinguished in some worthy work. I know how good you are, how good and true a friend of humanity. And some day, perhaps, in years to come, the light will shine upon you as it has shone upon others——"

"Let me be your husband, and wait for the light——"

"No, no! It is too far off—too uncertain. You will have my prayers always, wherever you are. I shall never forget you. I shall never cease to be sorry for you."

"And those prayers, these tears, are all that you will give me in return for my love? You will not give me one ray of hope?"

"I cannot, Walter."

"A woman's cannot means will not," he answered bitterly. "Well, the Arctic circle cannot be much colder than your heart is for me."

"You know that is not true."

"Yes, I know; I felt your heart beat against my own. That heart is human. Oh, if it were but mine! It is your will that is like the adamant stone; it is your will that can sacrifice human hearts to theological forms."

"No, no; I am no bigot. It is not a question of forms. It is the burning question, the essential question—a world to come. I cannot live without the belief in heaven, or help others to live. Christ, my rock of ages, has promised that heavenly home to all who suffer, to all who repent of sin. I cannot loosen my hold on my Saviour. I cannot trust my life to an unbeliever."

"It is to be farewell, then—farewell for ever?"

"No, no; you will come back to me by-and-by; and we shall be friends and fellow-workers again."

"Never! I love you too well. You must be all or nothing to me."

The door opened suddenly, and Mrs. Bellingham came in, alert and smiling, though not without traces of fatigue.

She looked first at Arden, holding out her hand to him, having been with Rachel in the morning.

"It was very good of you to wait for me. Phœbe tells me that you have been here since half-past four. You should have made tea for this poor creature, Rachel. He looks woefully white and tired. Why"—suddenly observing Rachel's tearful face—"what has happened? What is the trouble between you two fast friends?"

Rachel turned away, under the pretence of looking for her gloves on the table, where she had thrown them when she came in.

"What does it all mean, Walter?"

"Only that Miss Lorimer and I have been saying good-bye to each other, for a long time."

"Good-bye."

"I am going to North America with Archer Stormont. That restless spirit has set me on fire for adventure. I am going to Klondyke with him. Pray don't be alarmed—there is nothing terrible about the expedition——"

"I am not alarmed. I am only disappointed—intensely disappointed. Rachel, this is your doing! Why are you sending him away?"

"That question has been asked and answered, my dear kind friend," Arden said, after a pause, Rachel remaining silent.

"Rachel, it is foolish, wrong, cruel—cruel to yourself and to him," exclaimed Mrs. Bellingham, impetuously.

Arden went to Rachel, took her hand in his, and covered it with kisses. The hand was cold, but did not withdraw itself from his touch. No word was spoken; but he heard her stifled sob as he left her.

He grasped Mrs. Bellingham's hand with a muttered good-bye.

"No, no; you must let me see you again before you start."

"I fear it will be impossible. I am to sail next Saturday."

"From Southampton? Yes; Miss Jamford told me about their voyage. I shall be at Waterloo, perhaps, to say good-bye."

He tried to thank her, but the words would not come. He was too near the ignominy of tears.

He hardly knew how he had made his way back to his own rooms, when he found himself there in the gathering dusk, with his books surrounding him, the familiar faces looking at him in mute pity. He had moved amidst the London traffic, crossing Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly, like a sleep-walker, unconscious of the things about him, steering his way through the crowd automatically. The only thing he remembered of that dream-like journey was the clock of St. James's Church striking six as he went through the little court leading to Jermyn Street.

He had not known until this hour of his despair how strong his hope had been. He had foreseen difficulties, but in his inmost heart he had been conscious that he was loved, and he believed that love would rise supreme over every obstacle. And now all was lost; the affection that had given a new colour to his life was to be henceforward only a memory.

The world lay around him, dark and empty—a wilderness, a chaos, like earth without the sun.

He sat in the evening dusk beside the hearth where the fire burnt low, sat in a melancholy reverie, thinking what his future would be without Rachel. She had come into his life at its darkest hour, and her coming had been like light. Parting from her he parted with every joy and every hope. He shrank with horror from the treadmill round of an existence unblest by her presence and her love.

"And yet she loved me," he thought, clasping his hands above his head in a passion of revolt. "She loved me, and would have been happy with me; and she thrusts me out into the darkness, because I cannot pretend to be the thing I am not, even to buy her love."

And then he thought of what his life might have been if he had bartered truth and honour for that dear prize; if he could have pretended to believe in the things that were the

most precious part of her life. If he could have sat by her side listening to awakening sermons, and affecting to be impressed and edified; if he had been a regular worshipper at early services and had knelt with her at the altar. Would the acted lie have been a crime so terrible as to work like a blight upon his mind? Who would have been the worse for his hypocrisy? What mattered the mock offering if there were no God behind the veil? But then came the question of truth and honesty, and there the answer was plain. Not for the woman he adored, could he stain his soul with so base a lie. And there was more than self-respect, there was his reverence for her. Not for an eternity of bliss could he deceive her.

And so there was nothing for it but to shut the book that held the one romance of his life. The story ended suddenly, and in tears, her tears as well as his own. He was not unselfish enough to regret those tears. It soothed him to think that they had parted in mutual sorrow.

The church clock struck seven, and his servant brought in the reading-lamp, and lighted the candles on the mantelpiece.

"I did not hear you come in, sir, or I should have brought the lamp sooner. Mrs. Berry only just told me you came in an hour ago."

"I did not want the lamp. I am going for a turn in the park till eight o'clock. I shan't dress."

"You told me to remind you, sir, about the person from the East End who was to come this evening."

"Mr. Dartnell! Yes! Thank you, Martin."

"I have ordered sandwiches and coffee for nine o'clock, sir."

"Quite right; but I have one of my headaches, and I may send him a wire to put off his visit."

"Shall I send the message, sir?"

"No; I'll do it myself—or—I may change my mind."

"Very good, sir."

"And, excellent and faithful as you are, you are one of the people I shall be glad to get away from," thought Arden, as the valet helped him with his overcoat. "You, and fixed hours for meals, the necessity to dine, even on dust and ashes; all the monotonous machinery of life when the

spring is broken; the treadmill round, the recurrence of petty details, when the scent and the savour have gone out of everything."

The disgust of life had seized upon him like a mental malaria. All that had seemed fair and pleasant yesterday, the lighted streets, the dim grey sky sprinkled with pale stars, the bright windows of the club-houses, their open doors and lighted halls, suggesting go-as-you-please comfort, and cheerful gatherings of men who liked to be together without caring much about each other; the passing faces, carrying half-told histories in eyes and lips, steadfast, serious, trivial, gloomy, gay; the beggar-children with their pathetic appeal to the well-to-do; the puzzles, the questions, the griefs, the blisses in that passing show, all the things that had interested him in the London panorama, to-night seemed remote and unreal, as if he saw them behind a black veil, only just transparent enough to let him know that they were there, moving figures in a cloudy dumb-show.

The park was deserted, and he paced the quiet walks for more than an hour, not in thought, but in a dull despondency, unable even to think. He went into a post-office on his way back to Jermyn Street, and telegraphed to Archer Stormont—

"*I can join your expedition. Let me see you early to-morrow.*"

"The half-hour has struck, sir," his servant told him, when he went up to his rooms. "Mrs. Berry has done her best for the fish, but whiting don't bear to be kept back."

"Never mind the fish. I don't want any dinner."

"There's lamb cutlets, sir, and some grass."

"Very well. You can serve the cutlets," said Arden, wearily, thirsting to get away from a civilization which compelled a man to dine without an appetite, or to explain to his servants why he was not hungry.

He had not put off Michael's visit. The man's company might serve to distract his mind from that aching grief which gnawed his heart like a physical pain. He would have to talk, to argue, to enter into Michael's views of the world and mankind, and to meet him on the common ground of theories imbibed from Mill and Spencer. He would be

bored no doubt, tortured even, in the present state of his nerves; but anything would be better than that concentrated agony of a mind fixed upon one point, which he had suffered in the last three hours.

He made a feeble pretence of dining, under the too sympathetic eye of his old servant—son of his widowed nurse—born and reared on the Wildernsea estate, altogether conscientious and devoted. He had finished the mock meal before nine, and went back to his library, where the cheerful light of fire and lamp glowed on the richly bound books. His books had been his only foppery. For them nothing had been too good. But to-night he looked at them in a despairing wonder, as if they had suddenly become strange.

Addison, Lamb, Carlyle, Ruskin, Goethe, Heine, Scott, Balzac, de Musset—all the old favourites, the familiar friends! Could he ever find delight in them again? Alas, the dreams that he had dreamt, the dream of sitting with a beloved wife among his beloved books, of making all his chosen writers as dear to her as they were to him, the dream of mutual likings and fancies that would mould two minds into one, the dream of reposeful evenings after days spent in working for others. Vain dreams that a week ago had seemed so near being realized; and which now could delude him no more.

Michael was announced as the clock struck nine, having waited in the street, after his tramp from Stepney, till the exact moment.

"Why, you are as punctual as if you were calling on a cabinet minister," said Arden, shaking hands with him.

"I owe you that much respect, Mr. Arden. I've heard say that punctuality is the politeness of princes; and I think the man who can't keep time stamps himself as a weakling and a fool. But you're not looking yourself to-night. I hope you're not ill?"

"I am not quite myself. I have come to a sudden resolution which is rather upsetting. I am going to leave England for a longish time."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Arden. You'll be greatly missed in my part of the world. And I shall miss you more than I can say. I never thought that I should come to say

as much to any member of the spending and wasting and coat-of-arms-and-cockade classes—the gig-respectabilities."

"Go on, Michael! The phantasm-captains——"

"You ain't a phantasm captain, Mr. Arden; and I'm proud of your friendship. You say you are going to be away a longish time. Does that mean as much as a year?"

"It means between two and three years."

"And you are going to travel about the Continent, I suppose, going to stop at expensive hotels, and look at pictures and statues, and volcanoes and waterfalls?"

"No, Michael. I am going to North America—to Alaska, and to the Klondyke river."

"Klondyke? That's the place where they have found gold."

"Yes."

"And it's an awful rough life out there, ain't it? I read an account of it in a Sunday paper, not long ago. An arctic climate, no railway, no post-office; nothing. It won't suit you, Mr. Arden. You've pluck enough for anything, I dare say, but you haven't been brought up the right way. You've lived soft all your life. You'd better think twice about it, before you tackle such a job as that."

"I have thought about it till I'm tired of thinking, Mike, and I mean to face it."

"And you think you'll come home alive?"

"That's a question I haven't thought about, for it matters very little to me."

"I see, Mr. Arden. You've had some stroke of trouble that has changed you. Well, I know what that means. But I think you might hit upon something better than Klondyke gold-fields. You don't want money."

"For myself? Not a stiver."

"A voyage round the world in a steam-yacht, now; that would be more your form."

"Not the slightest use, Mike. I don't want champagne dinners, and poker parties in the evening. I want to cast myself adrift, to get a thousand miles from civilization."

"And your library," said Mike, looking round the close-packed Chippendale bookcases with intense admiration. "Can you bear to leave that?"

"You don't know how few books will serve a man if they

are the quintessence of literature—Horace, Dante, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, will pack in a small parcel; but I never knew a man who had come to the end of them."

"And there's 'Omer," said Mike. "I have got Pope's translation. There's a goodish lot of reading in that. It's what I call a cut-and-come-again book. It isn't like one of your foolish novels that's waste paper when the author has let the cat out of the bag—who stole the diamond, or who murdered the groom? Give me a book like 'Omer's 'Iliad.' It took me a year to read, before I knew all the fellows, which were Greeks and which were Trojans, and which was first favourite with Minerva or Juno. I didn't leave the book till I had 'em all pat."

"You are the best reader I ever met with, Mike. You put Dr. Johnson to shame."

"Ah, he talked of tearing the heart out of a book. I read that in *Tit-Bits*. That was very well for Samuel Johnson. He knew where the heart was, and how to find it. But it wouldn't do for a self-educated chap. It's dogged as does it, for such as me."

Martin appeared, carrying a tray, with a brown coffee-pot that wafted suggestions of Arabian nights in its aroma, and a pile of triangular sandwiches nestling in a fringed doyley, a daintiness of detail which was by no means thrown away upon the dock-labourer.

"I suppose you're going to take that fine gentleman with you?" said Mike, when he had poured out his coffee.

"Martin? No. He is a capital servant, but he would hardly do for Alaska. I am going with a friend who is used to a rough life, and I shall rough it as he does. He would laugh at the notion of a body-servant in the Chilkoot pass.

"You and your friend are going—any one else?"

"We take a doctor."

"That's wise," said Mike, and then, after a meditative silence, resumed, "I've read a bit about the life yonder, Mr. Arden, and it seems to me that the men that are most wanted are men of thews and sinews, labouring men, navvies—chaps like me; and you don't appear to have got one of that kind in your little lot."

"No, Mike; we are to be the labourers. We mean to put our shoulders to the wheel."

"So you may, but it isn't much of a shoulder to shove with. I know you've the pluck. Brain and heart are all there; but you haven't the fibre. You don't know what work means till you try. Pushing a sledge, carrying a boat, shipping and unshipping your cargo. It sounds as if it only wanted the will; but it wants something more than that, Mr. Arden. It wants the training; it wants the arms and the back that have carried their load since they were big enough to work. You three gentlemen will do your best, I don't doubt, and will come through it somehow; but you'd find the job all the easier if you had one big brute to help with the rough work—a brute like me. Will you take me?"

"You, Mike! What, are you tired of your life in London?"

"I've been dead sick of it for a long time; but I hadn't the spirit to turn it up. Klondyke would be a chance for me. I don't want to be paid for my work. If you're lucky, and find plenty of gold, I suppose I should come in for my share——"

"Of course you would."

"I've got a little bit of money laid by—enough for a berth in the steerage, and for my outfit."

"Don't trouble about that. If you want to go with us, and will share the rough and smooth, I'll stand the expense—always provided my friend is willing to take you. He's the organizer and captain of the expedition. I shall see him to-morrow; and I'll let you know to-morrow night."

"I hope your friend will see the use of me. But before you take any trouble on my account, there's something more to be said. Did Father Romney tell you anything about me, Mr. Arden?"

"He told me that there was a tragedy in your life."

"Did he tell you that I was a jail-bird?"

"No, no, Mike. I should be sorry to believe——"

"Not a thief—not a sneak and a liar—not an old offender—well known to the police—in and out of prison; not that kind of cur, Mr. Arden. But there's a dark stain across my life—the mark of blood."

Arden gave a startled look, and a flush passed over his face, as he repeated, "The mark of blood!"

"I have been buried alive, Mr. Arden; buried alive in a convict prison. There is a gap of seven years in my life—seven years in which I ceased to be a man, and became a machine, moving in a narrow space at the will of others, backwards and forwards, like a piston in a steam-engine; and all that time I had one thing to think about and dream about, one minute out of all the days and months and years of my life—one minute that blazed in red flame against black darkness, and haunted me, and followed me sleeping or waking—the one minute in which the deed was done."

"I cannot believe you were a murderer—though some horrible provocation——"

"Yes, there was provocation enough to make a sane man mad—the coroner's jury called it manslaughter—the coroner said he was sorry for me. But there were two lives lost—two souls sent to hell, if what the prison chaplain preached is true—two unrepentent sinners sent to everlasting woe—by my hand."

"Tell me your story, Michael—as much or as little of it as you like," Arden said, with undiminished kindness. "I shall believe every word you say, for I think you are made of good stuff, and that your life has been, and will be, a life of atonement."

"I'll tell you everything, Mr. Arden. There's nothing I want to keep back from you. It does me good, once in a way, to open my heart to a man who feels the brotherhood of men, rich and poor, saints and sinners, strong and feeble, as you feel it. I can confess to you as I confessed to Father Romney, before I had been a week in his parish."

"Be sure I can sympathize with you, Mike."

"I am sure, or I wouldn't open my lips. Well, it's a common story enough. I was in one of the great iron-works in Sheffield. I was foreman, and was getting good pay, and I had one of the prettiest girls in the place for my sweetheart—a girl that came of respectable parents, and had been well brought up. Her father was a clerk in a bank, and she was a bit above me; but I had done so well that there wasn't much difficulty made about our marriage; and we were married, and I don't think that ever lighter

feet trod the streets of Sheffield than hers and mine in the first half-year of our married life."

He stopped suddenly, and his eyes had the look of a man who turns his gaze inward upon the brain-picture of days gone by.

"Yes, Mr. Arden, we were happy. I had chosen my home in the country, three miles from the workshop, and almost out of the smoke. I had taken a cottage from a Building Society, which I was to pay for by instalments, and in six years it would be my own freehold. We had half an acre of ground; and all through that summer I used to work in my garden every evening as long as the light held out. I had to get up at five o'clock to be at the works in good time, and—well—I worked about as hard as a man can work and be happy. But when we had been living there about a year and a half, and when I had made our garden, and was full of satisfaction in the thought of what it was going to be as the years went on—so many years for the privet hedges—so many for the climbing roses to reach the gable-end and cluster round the chimney-stack—so many for the wisteria to cover the south wall—why, I had it all wrote down in my pocket-book, calculated almost as close as a bit of measurement at the works!—well, all of a sudden my wife told me the place was killing her. There was no one to talk to; there was nothing to see; and the air was relaxing. I'd heard that word before when people wanted to leave a place. Relaxing! They can always say it's relaxing. Who's to contradict them?"

"And you gave up your garden, I suppose?"

"Oh, Mr. Arden, I loved her too well to deny her anything. She wanted to live in Sheffield, and to Sheffield we must go. There was a great pile of workmen's dwellings just built there; the first of its kind; gas in all the rooms, baths, laundry, public kitchen, and every convenience; not like our cottage, where there was only the four walls, and our garden, with a row of century-old limes, where the blackbirds and thrushes sang all day long. A friend of Jenny's lived in the big house, and Jenny wanted to be near her friend, and she wanted to go to a theatre or a music-hall once in a way, and she wanted to be near her mother; in short, she wanted Sheffield."

"Well?"

"Well, she had her way. She knew she only had to ask and have. I took some rooms on the fourth floor. It seemed up in the skies, but there were two more floors overhead, and the rent was more than the rent of the cottage that would have been our own in less than five years. I had to forfeit what I had paid over and above what the rent would have been; but there was no help for it. Jenny must be happy, if I could make her so."

He got up and moved about the room.

"I'd better make short work of the rest, sir. Jenny's friend was a secret drunkard, one of those women who are always feeling faint, or feeling low, or feeling cold, and wanting a drop of spirits and water to set them right. Jenny learnt the trick of her. She began to be always ailing. And there was always the smell of brandy in our parlour when I came home at night. 'Mrs. Evans has been here,' I used to say, for I never suspected Jenny of wanting the stuff; but one night when I took her to the theatre I thought she seemed strange, and the glassy look in her eyes frightened me. She was drunk, Mr. Arden; my pretty, delicate, well-brought-up wife was drunk! She couldn't walk steadily, and I had to put her into a cab and take her home. I needn't tell you how I used to talk to her—how I used to kneel at her feet and beseech her to cure herself. I took her to Whitby, and left her there in charge of a woman I thought I could trust—I did this and that—but nothing stopped her. I would have borne with her to the end of the chapter, would have nursed her and cherished her, and loved her to the last hour of my life, if she had been true to me in the midst of her degradation. But one day I found out that she was carrying on with an old admirer, a clerk in a warehouse, a kind of gentleman, shiny boots, and flower in coat o' Sundays. She swore there was no harm in it. He'd dropped in to take a cup of tea, or she'd met him in the street by chance and gone to a tea-shop with him."

Again there was a pause, and then the words came faster, as the tragedy neared its climax.

"I wanted to believe her, and I believed her. But one night when I had meant to stay late at the works—where there was a big job going on against time—I was seized

with a sudden giddiness, and was obliged to give up. It was ten o'clock, and I had told Jenny I should be at the works till after midnight.

"Well, she had made the best of her chance. She had given a party. The remains of a fine supper were on the table, and empty champagne bottles. The visitors were gone, except him. Those two were together, sitting side by side in each other's arms, her head lying on his shoulder, and all her pretty hair falling loose over his breast, and her eyes looking up at him, drowned in tears—and I, well, I had a drop of drink on board myself, and at the sight of them I just went mad, and snatched a knife from the table—a carving knife that I'd sharpened myself the day before for the Sunday dinner—and I dragged him out of her arms, she shrieking and clutching him, as if she saw murder in my face, and I sent the knife through his foul heart. She gave one long, shrill scream as he dropped dead, and rushed to the window. It was a sultry night, and the window was wide open, a window opening on an iron balcony. In a moment, like a flash, she had flung herself over the iron rail, and was gone. I say it was all done in less than one minute—from the time I snatched up the knife—two souls gone to burning flame!"

"A terrible tragedy, Michael; but I for one do not believe in the burning flame. I think we pay for our misdeeds here, and have no after-reckoning to face. Your young wife blighted a life that might have been long and peaceful and gracious, a blessing to herself and you. She ran up a long score against herself, and paid it."

"But if I can't think of her in hell, how can I think of her in heaven—her sins burnt white in atoning fires—fair and innocent again—among the ransomed souls—saved by the blood of the Lamb?"

"Ah, Mike, if there is consolation in such dreams, cherish them. There are some who say we have no evidence that this life we are living is anything but a dream—since the dreams we dream with shut eyes are so like it. So a dream, more or less, is not worth disputing about. We are as Nature made us; we believe what we can, and we hope what we can. For some of us it is all dark beyond these voices."

"It was dark for me in those seven years under lock and key. My sentence was ten years, but they gave me three off for good conduct. Every one was kind to me. The chaplain lent me books. They were rather childish books—pious books; but I had never been a reader till then. My life had been all work and movement, with no time for more reading than a daily paper. Even those poor books were a relief, and after a year or so, he lent me better books—Darwin's "Voyage on the *Beagle*," Livingstone's "Travels," Dean Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church." He was very good to me. And then I had the Bible always. A man has to be shut in a cell or cast on a desert island to find out how much there is in that Book, so much that days and nights and months and years cannot come at the end of it—what a history of the world and all the races of man. Well, I came through my seven years alive; and since I left the prison I have been a strict abstainer, and a hard worker; and here I am, thews and sinews, at your service. If you want a navvy for the rough work of your expedition, you could hardly have a tougher specimen."

"You represent something more than thews and sinews for me, Mike. As for your tragedy, you have paid the law's penalty, and have paid dearer in mental suffering. A man would have a hard heart who could not pity you, as I do."

He held out his hand, which Michael grasped with fervour.

"And you'll let me go with you, Mr. Arden, your pal being willing?"

"My pal will be willing, Mike; at least, I think I may answer for him."

"Then you shall have a good servant, one that won't stint his labour," said Michael.

Stormont burst into the little dining-room in Jermyn Street early next morning, while Arden was at breakfast, and everything was settled in half an hour. He approved of the dock-labourer as a chum.

"There's no question of caste after we leave Juneau," he said; "copper-faces and white-faces, men and sleigh-dogs, are all equal. And if your enlightened radical can saw timber and build a boat better than you and I can, he'll be boss."

Arden called in Carlton House Terrace the day before he sailed. He had no apprehension of meeting Rachel there, as Friday was the afternoon for her attendance at a *crèche* which she herself had established, and of which she was the chief supporter; an afternoon when she received the mothers' weekly pence, and entertained them with a substantial tea, and a friendly talk over their troubles, and worries, and hopes.

Mrs. Lorimer greeted him with reproachful kindness. "What is this mad thing you are going to do, Mr. Arden?" she said, when they had shaken hands, and he had seated himself beside her embroidery-frame. "Mr. Stormont has told me all about it. I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"It is more than kind of you to be sorry. You and Mr. Lorimer have been such good friends. I could not go away without telling you how much I value your friendship. I shall carry the thought of your warm-hearted hospitality to the ice-region."

"But is it not madness in you to go there?"

"Alas! my dear friend, it is the only sensible thing I can do. I am not like Stormont, engaged to a girl who loves him, and who would rather marry him offhand than let him leave her. He turns his back upon happiness. I go to find a cure for sorrow."

"Something has happened to spoil your pleasure in life?"

"Yes. Something that ends every hope and every dream."

"I won't ask you any questions, for I think I know what your trouble is, though no one has told me anything about it. I am almost as sorry as you can be. I should have liked you for a son-in-law, Mr. Arden. (There now, I have said it!) You come of an old family, of a race that was honoured in the land centuries ago, when David's ancestors were labouring men. And we both like you—David and I. We want to see our dear girl married. This East End craze of hers is all very well, but it has robbed us of her company; and if she is going to set her face against marriage——"

"She will not, perhaps, when the right man comes——"

"I thought you were the right man. She has always taken pleasure in your society."

"Yes, we have been happy together; but that is over. She has fixed a barrier between us. To me it seems only the shadow of a line, but to her mind it is insuperable."

"I understand; you are not religious enough to please her. That comes of the old Puritan race, Mr. Arden. David is careless about such things. His head is packed so full of facts and realities that there's not much room left for religion; but his father and grandfather were leading lights in their little world of Primitive Methodists, and for them faith meant everything. With them, to believe rightly was to be saved. David's idea of religion is doing right things in the right way."

"He is an incomparable man, and his life is a grand example."

"And you really mean to go? You won't wait a few months, and give Fate another chance?"

"It would be no use; and the opportunity of going with Stormont is too good to lose. I am not fit for solitude. Your daughter's influence over me has been the strongest influence in my life; and I feel a lost wretch now that she has cast me adrift. Oh, believe me, I am not complaining of her; her motives are the highest and purest. I respect her view of life, even while I suffer."

"You are too generous. I think you ought to make another trial. She has been looking wretched these last few days, though she goes about her work as usual. I know she is unhappy. Come, Mr. Arden, try again."

"It would be useless. Good-bye, dear friend."

She went with him to the staircase, and gave him both her hands, with a motherly tenderness.

"I could have done more than like you; I could have loved you," she said. "Be sure you write to David or me from time to time, and tell us how Fate is using you."

"Nemesis has done her worst," he said, with a bitter smile, "but I shall be glad to let such good friends know if I am alive or dead; and if you will tell me—something—were it ever so little—about your daughter—just that she is well and happy—I shall be deeply grateful."

"I shall tell you all about her. Don't leave off hoping. I shan't."

The Conflict.

The inevitable Saturday came, that Saturday which has become a day of farewells, and the little party of four started on the first stage of their pilgrimage to the Land of Gold.

At Waterloo station, in the tumult of many partings, a thrill of pain vibrating through the agitated crowd, Arden found Mrs. Bellingham, calm in the midst of distracted passengers and hurrying porters.

Her farewell was full of affection, and not without hope.

"My poor friend, be of good courage," she said, "and be constant even to an unhappy love. Who knows what may be waiting for you in the days to come? I shall always believe in you."

And then, as the clamorous bell rang, and the last of the travellers were taking their seats, she gave him a packet addressed in the hand he knew so well.

"Rachel's good-bye," she said.

"A letter?" he asked eagerly.

"No; I don't think there is a letter, only a word of farewell, with the book she loves."

They clasped hands as the train moved slowly westward, past a cloud of waving hands and agitated faces.

He did not open the little parcel till late in the afternoon, when he was alone in his cabin, and the wooded shores of the Solent were fading into grey fog.

The book was the New Testament, bound in pale green silk, almost covered by a large white lily, a piece of delicate embroidery which Arden had seen in Rachel's hands as she sat beside him at some of their East End entertainments. It touched him that she had given him her own work—something of herself. She had written her farewell on the flyleaf.

"Good-bye, dear Friend. If this book cannot be to you what it is to me, I hope you will cherish it as the story of a Beautiful Life. I shall think of you and pray for you; and my prayer will be that you may find God in the wilderness."

The great ship moved over the waters like a floating town, so full of human life, of voices and movement, and the different classes of society. The Jamfords and Stormont occupied a luxurious seclusion in the finest state-rooms; Dartnell was in the steerage; and Arden and the Edinburgh

doctor were among the second-class passengers, Arden having taken advantage of Alick Mackenzie's economical considerations as an excuse for keeping clear of the Chicago family, whose exuberant enjoyment of the passing hour would have been more than he could bear. No matter that the cabin he shared with Mackenzie was exiguous, and had only a borrowed light; he was at least out of reach of gay company, safe from invitations to music or parlour games in the ladies' saloon. He could lie in his berth with his face to the wall, and fancy himself lying in his grave. He could not seem to have more utterly done with life, he thought, if the narrow space had been underground.

He was a good sailor, and his mental pain was neither intensified nor deadened by physical suffering. After two days spent in dumb despair, which Mackenzie took for suppressed sea-sickness, and was anxious to alleviate, he opened his cabin-trunk and selected two or three volumes from his little library of choice books; and the old, old friends talked to him with their kindly voices: Wordsworth and Coleridge, in whose life man's love for woman played so small a part; Lamb, for whom no star shone, and whose every personal utterance breathes of meek renunciation; Goldsmith, one of Nature's unfortunates, an exquisite light in an unbeautiful lamp. These all had been happy, with that temperate pleasure in simple things, and that tender appreciation of natural beauty, which elect souls enjoy; an equable state of mind that knows not the burning sun or the black storm-clouds of passion. Their voices soothed him in his dejection, and subtle shades of thought and feeling appealed to him as they had never done before.

His first three nights at sea had been sleepless, but on the fourth night he slept long and profoundly, and his dreams were many and vivid. Rachel was his companion through the labyrinth—in many and strange places—amongst unknown multitudes, or amongst people whom they seemed to have known always. They were together, engaged in the work they had so lately been doing, but with the dream-element of strangeness and impossibility in everything. Yet the dreams had been full of happiness—bliss too exquisite for expression—and her face, her voice, the touch of her hand, had been so real that he had told himself "*this* is not

a dream;" and waking in the wintry dawn it had been some moments before he realized that he had been living among shadows, that he was more than a thousand miles from the place that held Rachel.

On the fifth night his dreams were troubled, though Rachel was in them still. They were parting; the scene in Mrs. Bellingham's library was acted over again, under strange conditions. He held her in his arms, as he had held her in those passionate moments, and the face that looked up at him was the face he had seen then, the same pale lips, the same tearful eyes; but her words were not the same.

She spoke like a prophetess; the deep note of warning thrilled him.

"You are living without God in the world," she said; "but who is to defend you from the power of the devil? You have chosen between man's two masters, Christ and Satan. You have chosen the Lord of Hell instead of the Lord of Heaven; and your existence on earth and after earth will be miserable. These tears are not of love, but of pity—pity for your dreadful fate!"

Her speech was ringing in his ears when he awoke, and her speech was like the cry of pain. The dream, and the strange tones of the dream-voice, haunted him all day, as he sat alone, in a sheltered corner of the deck, watching the racing waves and the gradual changes of a wintry sky. He could interest himself in nothing, neither the moving figures on the deck nor the progress of the ship, neither his books nor the conversation of Alick Mackenzie, who wanted to talk to him, but was repelled by his abstracted manner, which he could no longer attribute to sea-sickness.

The sixth night brought fainter dreams, pale shadows moving through Cimmerian darkness, and Rachel's form was not among those shadows. His sleep was broken and agitated, and in his waking intervals the old trouble clouded his mind.

"I say, old chap, I'm afraid you've had a touch of nightmare," said Mackenzie, in his strong young voice, when the steward brought them their morning tea. "You'd better let me give you a bromide draught before you turn in to-night."

"I'd better let you give me a dose of prussic acid, if I want to dream no more hellish dreams!"

"No, no, my dear fellow, don't talk rot! Your nerves are out of order—or perhaps it's your digestion. You don't eat enough for a sparrow, and the only way to do a sea-voyage well is to feed like an alderman. But I'll give you a harmless mixture that will settle your nightmare dreams, if you'll come to your meals regularly, and take a little exercise on deck, instead of moping in a dark corner."

"Do you remember that story in Scott's "Demonology"—the story of the man who was haunted, first by a black cat, next by a skeleton, then by a gentleman usher? He was a man of sense, and he knew the things were not there—not the actual things; but the spectral appearances were enough to take all the pleasure out of life."

"Have *you* been seeing things?"

"No, I have seen nothing; but the story of those three spectral forms came into my mind as I lay awake this morning."

"You had been dreaming ugly dreams?"

"Yes."

"You won't be troubled with those when we are tramping in Alaska."

XIII.

THERE could hardly be a more startling change of scene than from the west and the east of London to Juneau in Alaska, the rising city, at the gateway of the gold country, the headquarters of several steamboat lines, and the busy mart where the miners buy their outfit, a picturesque settlement at the foot of the snow-mountains, whence the avalanches come tearing down day after day. Here Archer Stormont and his companions bought revolvers, guns, and ammunition, boat-building tools, provisions, and miners' clothes, and shipped themselves and their luggage on the little steamboat, *Adventure*, bound for the Indian village of Dyea, the extreme northern limit of navigation. Here, after two nights and one day, the steamer dropped anchor a mile from the shore, and a gigantic canoe, manned by painted Indians, shipped the four men and their cargo, and carried them ashore, in the teeth of a gale.

A curious change from Jermyn Street lodgings and a club in Pall Mall, to lie under canvas near an Indian village, in a district where there was only one white inhabitant among a goodly tribe of redskins, a race whose picturesqueness and personal dignity had the drawback of a quarrelsome temper, an insatiable greed of gain, and an unappeasable craving for strong drink, the fire-water which exalted them to madness, and provoked them to murder, or reduced them to drivelling imbecility, according to quantity or temperament.

This was but the first stage in the pilgrimage. The journey by mountain and lake began at this point. Travellers less adventurous might have chosen a slower and easier route by taking the steamer from San Francisco to St. Michael, and thence by a stern-wheel river-boat up

the Yukon to Cudahy in the gold regions, a distance of sixteen hundred miles; but for Stormont and his companions the shorter overland route, with its vicissitudes and dangers, was much more alluring.

From Dyea they started for the Chilkoot pass, having engaged a gang of Indians to help in carrying their baggage, in their canoes, as long as the route lay beside the river, and then unloading and distributing the packs for the tramp across the mountain, each man carrying his share of the baggage, the English adventurers as well as the redskins, though, by Michael's contrivance, Arden's load was one of the lightest.

"You know, he's been brought up too soft," he whispered to Stormont, at the foot of the pass.

It took them something over a day and a night to cross the mountain, tramping in the early morning, and late evening, far into the depths of night, and resting in the heat of the day, when the sun had softened the surface of the snow and made walking impossible.

All the travellers enjoyed the long rest in that stupendous scene, a panorama of snow-mountain and glacier, high above the limit of vegetation; a world of everlasting winter, mountain rising above mountain; a scene in which all that is common and humdrum in man's daily life seems too petty and futile to be remembered or valued, face to face with Nature in her most majestic form.

A time would come perhaps in the near future, if the race for gold continued, when even that remote and romantic region would be vulgarized; when strings of packhorses would scale the mountain pass, and the painted Indian would cloth himself in fustian and corduroy; when steam-trams would grind and screech beside those silent reaches of blue water where the wild fowl skimmed and the salmon leapt, unscared by man; when steamers would pant and bustle from landing-stage to landing-stage, and the restless feet of ever-increasing multitudes would beat down reed and flower on every path by lake and river. But for to-day this white world of mountain and flood had all the majesty and all the romance of primeval nature, and the Indian's hut and the miner's camp only served to accentuate the solitude and measure the vastness of the scene.

Of the four adventurers, Michael Dartnell seemed most to feel the glory of the earth.

"I can't believe that there's any such place as Sheffield," he said, stretched at full length on his blanket, looking up at the amphitheatre of hills, when they had pitched their camp for the afternoon high up in that Arctic wilderness, with the best part of the ascent accomplished. "I can't believe that there's hundreds and thousands of grimy wretches sweating in workshops, and breathing smoke, while there's a world like this under a sky like that. Look at the blue of it! Was there ever such blue? And to think of their sky in the black country! And to think of the courts in Whitechapel, where a man turns sick at the stench of the rooms that men and women live in, and children are born and die in!"

"You ought to have been a Chilkoot, Mike," said Stormont, glancing at the Indians, who were sprawling near, sleeping off their ill-temper at having been refused more than a moderate allowance of whisky.

It was illegal in Alaska to sell whisky to an Indian; but it was another thing to give him a tin cup of fire-water after a long climb up the snow-bound mountain paths, carrying a pack that weighed over a hundred pounds.

Mike had carried as heavy a pack, but had resolutely refused the fire-water. The Englishmen's meal consisted of bacon and frying-pan bread, the most luxurious fare they were likely to get till the end of their journey; nor had they any expectations of rich living or delicate cookery in the gold-fields.

But the crisp atmosphere and the day's toil gave gusto to common fare, while at each meal they brewed for themselves a liberal jorum of tea, the globe-trotter's elixir.

"The Jamfords satiated me with their restaurant dinners and suppers," said Stormont, "but I never tasted anything at one of their smart feeding-shops to equal our frying-pan bread, when it has browned well, and has the taste of the bacon in it."

"I own I should relish a crust of bread that didn't taste of bacon-fat, just for a change," said Arden.

"Ah, that's where Mike's word comes in. You were brought up too soft. You've never been in Mexico, or the

Red River country, or on the South African veldt. But you've taken to our rough-and-tumble life in the right spirit, Arden, and I think it suits you better than civilization."

"It does, Archer, and I should never want to go back to civilization, if——"

"If you could get rid of that trick of looking across your shoulder every now and then, as though you thought some one was there? I know it's only a nervous habit, old fellow; but it's an uncanny kind of trick that is apt to get upon other people's nerves, ain't it, Alick?"

"If Arden hadn't assured me that he has never had so much as a glimpse of the other world, I should give him credit for being the seventh son of a seventh son, with the gift of second sight," answered Mackenzie.

"I am not a Scotchman, and cannot put in a claim to one of your national privileges," said Arden.

"Ah, but there's something wrong," said Stormont, "something that jars the mental strings. I believe you had a touch of the evil eye while you were in Rome. You had a haunted look when I met you there, and it stuck to you all the time you were in the city; and I saw the look at Frisco when Mackenzie and I were inclined to loiter, and when you were in such a feverish hurry to get ahead. If your nerves are out of gear, you ought to let Alick prescribe for you."

"Can he minister to a mind diseased?"

"I don't suppose he can; but you're not Macbeth, and you haven't the murder of a pious old king on your conscience. Alick's a clever chap—passed a high-class exam: top of the list——"

"Don't expatiate," said Mackenzie, laughing. "It's no use. I've given Arden the finest nerve-bracer that medical science has invented, and he swears it has done him no good."

"I suppose because there was nothing the matter with me," said Arden. "It was as useless as a letter addressed to an empty house. Don't worry about me, like good fellows. I shall lose what Stormont calls the haunted look before we get to Klondyke."

The descent of the pass was easy work, and they did that part of the journey at night, when the mountain peaks

above them and the lake below were silvered by the newly risen moon, and the track was crisp under their feet, except here and there, where a step plunged them up to their knees in melted snow. Their party of Indians tramped ahead of them in single file; and so in the early morning they came to Lake Lindeman, where they found several camps and an animated scene, the miners all busy building boats, or preparing to build, packing their stores, loading them on raft or canoe, sawing timber in an extempore saw-pit, or cooking the morning meal of beans and bacon, with the inevitable frying-pan bread.

Here Stormont's little company established themselves, and redskins and whiteskins luxuriated in a long day's rest after the passage of the mountain; and here Arden's select little company of great writers came into requisition, Stormont's stock of literature being comprised by the New Testament, pressed upon him by an anxious mother on the eve of his first voyage, and conscientiously carried from continent to continent, and a cheap copy of Pickwick, a comedy of early Victorian manners which he knew by heart.

Mackenzie had armed himself with some tough medical works and "The Ring and the Book," being an enthusiastic Browning worshipper, and having kept the poet's spacious work for an occasion like this.

"It's a poem that can't be digested in the madding crowd," he remarked.

"I'm not an irreligious man," he exclaimed, "but I knew some of you would bring a Bible, and I could borrow it for a Sunday chapter."

On inquiry, it appeared that there was only one Bible among the community, and that was owned by Dartnell, who was well supplied with solid literature, having brought half a dozen volumes of Carlyle, Darwin's "Origin of Species," Mill's "Political Economy," the *Globe* Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible.

Here where there was no range of choice, no room for caprice, each book acquired a new value.

"What will become of us when we have read them all?" exclaimed Mackenzie, who was a rapid reader, even of science.

"They will last till we get to Dawson City."

"And will there be book-stores at Dawson, do you suppose?"

"There'll be everything at Dawson, Alick," answered Stormont. "It's too near the States to be slack in the race of progress. There'll be chapels, and music-halls, and theatres, and restaurants, and gaming-hells, everything the heart of man can hunger for."

Michael was in his element next morning, when the saw-pit had to be dug, and still happier when with axe on shoulder he tramped through a little wood of spruce firs to choose the timber for the boat.

Work was Mike's religion, and to put his hand to a new craft and show that he could conquer difficulties was pure delight. "Me and a bag of tools against the world," was Mike's motto, faulty as to grammar, but of a grand courage. Big as he was at all times, the man seemed to grow bigger amidst Nature's immensities, and face to face with peril. The Chilkoot Indians admired and fawned upon him, and demonstrated by their every look and movement that in their opinion he was leader and master of the gang.

And Mike's soul expanded in the novel environment. From the day the travellers left Juneau all difference of caste had been ignored; and for the first time in his life he had found himself in his ideal world of perfect equality between man and man. And for the self-taught day-labourer, the student of half a dozen books, to find himself on such terms with men of education and good-breeding was a delightful experience.

In every preacher of equal rights there is, no doubt, an unconscious bent towards the levelling upwards, which Samuel Johnson satirized; but though Mike held that God made dukes and Sheffield iron-workers equals, he also believed in the iron-worker's brotherhood with the drunken pauper, and the convicted felon, the sinners, and sufferers, and offscouring of mankind. So now in this northern wilderness he accepted the painted Indian as his brother, and by some indefinable human magnetism contrived to make the Indian understand as much.

"I don't know how we should have got on without Mike,"

said Stormont, when the first day's work was done, and they were all squatting in a circle with the Indians, eating their evening meal, and introducing the Chilkoots to the luxury of tea-drinking, which they took to kindly enough, after it was borne in upon them that there would be no more fire-water till they had passed the rapids.

"You two fellows have worked with a good heart," continued Stormont, "but there ain't much of the primeval man about either of you, and I don't think sawing raw timber is the walk of life in which Nature meant you to cut a handsome figure."

Arden and Mackenzie bore this reproof in silence, with a rueful look at their hands, which were blistered and swollen almost beyond the semblance of humanity.

"We shall get ourselves in training very soon," Alick said presently. "But there's a considerable difference between the weight of a lancet and a saw—and it's three years since I've done anything to harden my hands, except an afternoon at golf on the Mussleburgh links, once in a blue moon."

The timber was sawn in due time, Mike doing the lion's share of the work. The boat was built, and launched; and then began the adventurous voyage by the long chain of lake and river and rapid, between Lake Lindeman and the gold-fields.

The wide reaches of water, sapphire blue where it gave back the glory of the sky, opaque and mud-stained in the shallows along the shore, the reedy banks and wooded islands, red rocks rising sheer out of the bosom of the lake, the cañons where the heaped-up water rushed furiously between steep walls of basaltic rock, which time had worn into shapes as fantastic as the forms that haunt fever-dreams, all had their charm and their influence for the four travellers. Each man after his lights tasted and absorbed the beauty of the northern landscape in the short northern summer; but Mike, until he climbed the Chilkoot pass, had seen nothing grander than the Yorkshire hills, and for him this Arctic world was a stupendous revelation. An imagination that had been nourished upon the Bible and upon Milton's verse, had not been without its pictures of natural beauty, but the loftiest

visions of the untravelled dreamer were dwarfed by the reality of mountains that rose peak above peak to the far-off pinnacle of Mount Elias, the Mont Blanc of Alaska, and vast lakes branching out into rivers that wound their way to the ocean, through distances, if not measureless to man, certainly measureless to the unscientific redskin, who only reckoned the length of the river by the number of days it took him to float his raft from the lake to the sea.

The building of the boat was accomplished in something over a week, busy days that left no record for the travellers, save the slow progress of their work, from the preparation of their saw-pit to the packing of their stores on the finished boat. Every day brought the companions closer in sympathy and friendship; and all that was best in the character of each was developed by their isolation from the common ruck of humanity.

Nature's soothing influence had done much for Walter Arden since they left Juneau. The laborious days, the quiet nights, in an atmosphere whose purity was like an elixir, had helped him to contemplate his sorrow, as something inevitable that was a part of himself, and must be carried with him to his grave, without prejudice to his mission upon earth. Whatever was in his means to do for the common good of mankind must be done, even though he himself were never to know happiness. He had to work for the more unhappy, in the complex elements of whose misery no drop of bitter had been wanting, and no drop of sweet had been given. He who hoped for no celestial compensations had to help those for whom this transient life gave so few chances of joy. To lighten some of the intolerable burdens, to bring light into some of the dark places—that mission to which Rachel had given herself in her youth and beauty—must be his work in years to come, and its accomplishment his sufficient reward. He shaped his vision of the future, lying awake late into the night, amidst the immensities, with Rachel's book in his hand, his fingers resting lightly on the delicate cover, every thread of which had passed through her sensitive hands. It was something of her very self, a link between them; and if there were any scrap of sense or reason in the idea of

thought-transference, surely his thoughts, which followed her image in retrospective musings through all his hours of solitude, would find their way to her brain and heart, by the wireless telegraphy of love.

The story of a Beautiful Life read over and over again, and meditated upon tenderly in those silent nights, had been to him, not all that Rachel hoped it might be, but at least a stimulus and incentive to goodness. If he could not look above or beyond the limits of an earthly pilgrimage, the lakes and hills of Palestine, the life which ended on Calvary was at least to his mind the loveliest life that ever was lived, and the supreme example of perfect manhood given to the emulation of mankind. It was a narrow view, no doubt, which shut out every element of the unknowable and unthinkable; but it was the view of men who have done splendid service to humanity, and who have not been all unhappy in a life from which they saw but one dark issue, nothingness and the worm.

If those toilsome days in the wilderness could not bring him gladness, he had at least found relief from that haunting horror which had been with him in the earlier stages of his pilgrimage. That subtle, undefinable sense of an unseen presence no longer troubled him; and again he told himself that it was a question of nerves. In his darkest hours the dying profligate's hideous threat had repeated itself in his brain with a maddening recurrence, like the refrain of a song in the wakeful hours of fever. He had hated himself for the weakness of mind that could be influenced by the wild speech of baffled rage, the impotent fury of the savage beast at bay; but the spectral appearance of that ghastly countenance, the inexorable hate in the glassy eyes, the writhing lips that seemed to scatter poison in a cloud of blood-stained foam—all, face, speech, attitude, with every movement of the colossal frame, had haunted his sleeping and waking hours, at intervals, ever since that Lenten dawn on the waste ground beyond Belleville. And still worse than the image and the words had been the shapeless unseen horror, the sense of something near him that was not human and was all evil. Only in Rachel's company had he found peace; and now, it seemed to him that it was the thought of Rachel, her image following him and absorbing his being, that had

exorcised the demon, and given him respite from mental torture.

By the long chain of lakes and the rivers that linked them, sometimes shooting the rapids at some hazard of life, sometimes, when the peril was too imminent, carrying their stores and their boat along shore, sometimes with the help of Indians, sometimes by their own unaided labour; through changes of weather, days of unsupportable heat, and days of springlike coolness, calm days, and stormy; sometimes sailing on a lake of glass, their blanket-sail faintly fanned, and the swift current bearing them over the untroubled water; sometimes having to row for dear life in the teeth of a gale that changed the placid lake to a raging sea, and came near swamping their boat, and which played havoc with their cargo of stores. Through days of ceaseless activity and rapid progress, and days of enforced idleness, when the stores upon which their subsistence depended had to be slowly dried by a wood-fire—long days which Stormont and Arden beguiled by stalking a cariboo deer, or shooting grouse among the hills, while Mackenzie fished for salmon in the Hotalinqua river, with Mike in attendance upon him, or lay under canvas reading for his next examination.

"I can't imagine a better line of country for a reading-party than the shore of Lake Lebarge," he said, after a long day's studious seclusion. "I never read with half the comfort in my rooms in Castle Street, not even with the glorious memory of Walter Scott to help me. While you've been stalking that imaginary cariboo, I've been dissecting mosquitos, and hunting down the malaria bacillus, and I believe I've got a good deal nearer catching him than you've got to the deer."

"The cariboo is a slippery customer—but he's a real entity, Mac. I saw him drinking in that silvery streak up yonder. I might have hit him with a stone——"

"Why didn't you? You might have stopped his wild career and cut his throat mercifully in time for our supper."

"I said I might, Mac. I didn't say I could."

"Go to, lad! Your cariboo is of the family of Mrs. Harris and the White Doe of Rylston. Well, thanks to my

superior capacity as an angler, and Mike's native genius as a cook, ye'll have a feast of broiled salmon, and a batch of slap-jack that hasn't turned to lead in the cooking. Mike's frying-pan bread always rises."

"And never tastes of rancid fat," said Arden.

"That's a pernicketty objection, mon! You're a wee bittie o'er nice about your provand," retorted Mackenzie, whose investigations had put him in high spirits.

In fair weather or foul, as wood-cutter, sawyer, boat-builder, packer, or cook, Michael Dartnell had proved himself master of the situation. Quick, dexterous, but steady withal, and with a dogged perseverance that would not allow the possibility of defeat, he vanquished every obstacle and made light of every difficulty.

And when the pilgrims had come to the end of their journey, when they had shot the perilous Five Finger rapids, and passed Fort Selkirk, and the Indian village at Pelly River post, and had navigated their boat safely down the Yukon river to the mining-camp known as Forty Mile—an assemblage of log-cabins, billiard-parlours, restaurants, gambling-dens, which gold-seekers had created in the heart of the wilderness, and where missionary enterprise had built a church—Michael showed a shrewd intelligence in the choice of a locality for their initial attempts. He had talked with every whiteskin and redskin he had met during their seven-weeks' journey, had questioned them closely as to every characteristic of the gold-bearing spots, had absorbed every detail in the story of their successes and their disappointments; and in exploring those barren shores for gold he had rather the air of a man who had come back to a familiar country, with a full knowledge of the soil, than of a stranger in the land.

It was he who, after several unprofitable attempts, directed the expedition along a creek of the Yukon river, an obscure inlet which had been thought not worth exploration until Stormont's party began their experimentary diggings, when it was considered that the new-comers were greenhorns to waste their time in such an unlikely direction. Michael had been told of the spot by a consumptive miner faring slowly towards Juneau, one of the innumerable failures in the multitude of gold-hunters, a man who had broken down in

health, and abandoned the struggle, at a time when he believed himself on the threshold of a discovery that would make his fortune. The result proved that he was right. The metalliferous streak showed itself during their second day's diggings, and the four men staked out their claims along the edge of the stream, and then went back to Forty Mile Camp to record them.

XIV.

Walter Arden to Douglas Campbell.

Box 89, Post Office, Forty Mile Camp, on the Yukon River, Dominion of Canada.

My dear Douglas,

Your friendly reply to my letter of the summer before last, despatched soon after our arrival at the Miner's Metropolis, came into my hands long after it was written, and at a period of preoccupation and trouble when I felt incapable of replying. I write now after a gap in time of nearly two years, and after an illness in which my life hung upon a thread for many dismal days and nights, when I had no knowledge of the passing hours, but lay like a log, watched and cared for by anxious friends, and with only one sense left me, the sense of pain, and an agonizing idea of the eternity of hours, sleepless hours, in which I lay on my back, with wide-open eyes staring at the rough timbers of a cabin roof, and peopling that rugged shelter with hideous creatures, the horrible inventions which go with a temperature of a hundred and five.

I have been on the edge of the abyss, Douglas, so near death that life and all it had ever given me of joy or woe melted into the distance of things half remembered, and I only knew, in a vague dim way, that once I had lived and rubbed shoulders with living men. Life was the dream, death the reality. An open grave was in the foreground of all those fever pictures. It was always there; and every now and then I could feel myself slipping down into it. The smell of the clay was always in my nostrils; the sound of the pick and the shovel was always in my ears. I could feel the four walls of the pit encompassing me, and the pit

grew deeper every day, and the faces of the friends looking over the edge had a far-away look. It may be that the labour with pick-axe and shovel in the rough shale and gravel by the river brink, which had been my daily task for so long, had made the odour and the sound of the earth a part of my sense of being, an experience so continuous and so vivid that the impression it had left upon my senses came between me and every other thought. I can only thus account for that ever-present idea of a grave; since in my conscious hours I had no dread of death, and had small cause to value my life, having missed the one blessing that would have made life dear.

Well, after passing through that fiery furnace of pain and delirium—the first caused by the stab of a knife that went perilously near my heart, the second the effect of what my devoted friend and doctor calls symptomatic fever—I am my own man again; my own man, with grey streaks in my hair and deeper lines on my forehead than I ought to have at eight and twenty; my own man, with three hundred thousand pounds sterling, as the result of less than two years' toil on a creek between the Yukon and the Klondyke, this sum representing a fourth share of the gold realized by the four partners in the little company of which Arthur Stormont is leader. One of the four partners has perished, and we hold his treasure in trust for his legal heirs; and, as we know absolutely nothing of his kindred, the business of arriving at a just disposal of his property may be arduous.

You must not think that this northern El Dorado offers a certainty of wealth for all comers. I could tell you of men who have toiled in the gold-region for years, summer and winter, worked out claim after claim, journeyed from creek to creek and river to river, followed every trail wherever there has been the promise of luck, and have gone on board the steamer for St. Michael with empty pockets and broken hearts. Others there are who, after a long series of failures, have stumbled upon a spot prolific in golden ore. Our case is exceptional, for we were lucky almost at the outset, and we owed our success to the intelligence of the man whose bones we are leaving in the Arctic wilderness, and whose fate was the climax in a horrible tragedy.

This letter which I have begun to-day will be long, for

it is to be a statement rather than a letter, a categorical narration of circumstances which are to me full of wonder and mystery. You are the only man to whom I would care to unfold that story, with all the dark fancies that have gone along with it in my own mind, for you are the only man from whom I should not expect ridicule or contempt. Of your indulgence and your sympathy I know myself secure.

My communication may occupy some days, for I am still too weak for any prolonged exertion, even so small an effort as letter-writing; and my chum and doctor is as watchful of my convalescence as he was of my illness, and won't allow me any liberties.

You have been told in my letter from San Francisco of the circumstances that led to my leaving England, and how the disappointment of a cherished dream sent me out into the wilderness. You know how small a factor the thirst for gold was in my scheme of life; and you will understand that the fortune that has fallen into my lap is like the pile of hundred-franc pieces in front of a wealthy idler at Monte Carlo, who puts down his stake on the *trente et quarante* table without caring a jot for the result.

I wrote very briefly, I know, of the fourth member of our little band—Michael Dartnell, familiarly Mike, a working man from the east end of London, a socialist in politics, and a man of shrewd intellect and tremendous physical power, a valuable associate in such an adventure as ours.

It is chiefly of him I have to write in this record.

I resume my task after a night's rest, and the infinite blessing of a dreamless sleep.

The man Michael interested me deeply, and I had every reason to believe that he was honestly and warmly attached to me. He had a very strong feeling of the equal rights of men; and it was through me that he found himself for the first time living on equal terms with men born and reared in a social sphere above his own. I know that he greatly appreciated that privilege, and that even in our rough way of living he was able to perceive the differences of habits and manners, and to modify and refine his conduct in trifles. His fervour in the best kind of self-education needed no stimulus. The few books which he knew and

loved were the books that open the gates of the intellectual world. He enriched his mental treasury with those other books which *we* knew; and every day that we spent together brought him nearer to our level, and made him a better companion. He became less ponderous and dogmatic, learnt the touch and go of a lighter style of argument; and, as his reading widened, learnt to look at a question from more than one side. He interested me more than I can say, and I made him my friend. He had told me his life-tragedy; and after we had gone a long way on our pilgrimage, and when all my past life seemed to have receded into an infinite distance, I opened my heart to him and told him of my hopeless love for Rachel Lorimer. He knew her and worshipped her, as the bringer of light into dark places, and was able to understand and sympathize with my feelings as perhaps no one else could have done.

It would be difficult to convey to you what a tower of strength that man was to us, from the hour we left Juneau on the river steamer for Dyea, till the hour of our triumphant success, our allotments on a creek off the Klondyke river having yielded a harvest of gold rare in the history of placer-mining, when his health suddenly gave way, and the Hercules we had all admired as the embodiment of virile power became in a few short winter days weaker than a six-year-old child. The hands in which the woodman's axe or the miner's shovel had seemed light as a feather, lay on the coverlet, too feeble to hold a cup to the burning lips. It was only a common cold, he had declared a few days before, when we saw that he was not quite himself; but the common cold became congestion of the lungs, and all Mackenzie's efforts failed in arresting the evil.

I don't think any of our little band quite understood how much this man had been to us, till we saw him lying helpless in our rough cabin, with Alick Mackenzie sitting by his bed in a melancholy silence, and bending down every now and then, with the doctor's intent countenance, to listen to the labouring breath, or to wait with watch in hand for the last record of the clinical thermometer. Only then, perhaps, in those slow hours of gloomy foreboding, did we realize how much we owed to our low-born comrade, and how utterly all idea of caste or social difference had dropped

out of our minds. We had been companions for nearly two years; and in that time the man's mental outlook had grown to our own level, while in vigour of brain and acuteness of perception he seemed our superior. As we owed fortune to his vigilance to observe and to gather information, to say nothing of the miner's *flair*, that curious instinct, which seems to excel the power of the scientific geologist, so we owed much of our happiness in the Arctic wilderness to his courage and patience in difficulty, his unwavering cheerfulness in deprivation and disaster.

"He was the best of us all," Stormont said, on the bitter night when Mackenzie told us the end was near, and when we two left the hut together, shrinking from the agony of those final hours.

Alas, old friend, you know how tragic the passage from life to clay is to the man who can see no light beyond that dread moment when the last sigh leaves the ashen lips.

It was at the beginning of March, our second winter in that polar region. The frozen lakes gave no promise of a coming spring; the ironbound soil in which we worked needed continuous fires to combat the frost, and strenuous effort and dogged persistence; but we had laboured patiently through the worst part of our second winter, with a result that far surpassed even Stormont's expectations; and we meant to continue working to the end of May, and to start upon our return journey by lake and river early in June.

In many a long talk round the log-fire we had debated the use we should make of our treasure when we got back to civilization.

Stormont's fortune was pre-engaged, and was to be invested in the Jamford Grain Company. Mackenzie meant to establish himself in Harley Street, the youngest consulting physician in the neighbourhood, since with an income which few doctors achieve at the end of a distinguished career, he could afford to wait for patients, and to devote himself to scientific research. For myself wealth could suggest no scheme of personal happiness, and even philanthropy could not interest me, unaided by Rachel.

Michael was the most jubilant among us, for in his three hundred thousand pounds—reckoned roughly, and

considerably under-estimated—he saw the means of carrying out some of his Utopian ideas.

He told us how he meant to travel all over Europe, taking with him a little knot of working men, selected for their intelligence, and power of appreciating natural beauty and the wonders of art. With these companions, shifting them every three or four months, he meant to see all that the world contains of interest or delight; extending his travels as the years went on to the four quarters of the earth, and to every island of picturesque charm, but never a solitary traveller; always carrying with him companions of his own class, labouring men, his inferiors in education, but capable of improvement, and eager to improve.

"And some tropical night, when you are sitting under a palm tree, reading Omar Kayyam to them, one of the chosen band will stab you in the back, for the sake of your wallet of travelling-money, and the others will go shares with him in the plunder, and help him to scrape a grave in the sand," said Stormont.

We all made mock of his optimistic schemes; but nothing could shake him in his conviction that his fortune was a thing to be held in trust for his fellow-men.

Well, those dreams seemed to have come to a sudden close. Our friend and fellow-labourer was dying. Mackenzie had told us in the saddest words that all hope was over. The last sands were running slowly through the glass, the grey shadow with the scythe stood by the pillow, where the doctor watched in a dumb patience, waiting for that which seemed the inevitable end.

Stormont and I wandered far, in our silent tramp along the frost-bound shore, with eyes that stared absently at the narrow stream forcing its way between wide banks of ice, and with hearts as heavy as lead. We seldom spoke to each other; and when we broke the melancholy silence it was only to speak of the man we had left dying, and whom we talked of already in a past tense, as if he were dead.

"What a fellow he was," said Stormont; "strong as a lion, and true as steel."

We had been tramping for nearly two hours under the cold brilliancy of these northern stars, when I was seized with a sudden eagerness to go back to the hut, and began

to hate myself for the cowardly dread that had made me shun those last hours of unconsciousness, those hours in which, though he still lived, we knew he was no longer with us.

"I must grasp his hand once more, for the last time," I told Stormont, "though he will not know."

"Don't hurry. It's waste of power," Stormont answered. "He must have gone ever so long ago. Mack only gave him an hour. Life was ebbing fast."

I did not slacken my pace, but went along the backward track almost at a run. I hated myself for having fled from my friend's death-bed.

What if a flash of light had come at the last, and he had looked about him with recovered consciousness, seeking the faces of his friends, and had found only one of the three —only the doctor, with his professional interest in death? What would he have thought of us? How might that great strong heart have been wounded by a desertion that would seem like indifference?

The return took a long time, for we had walked far in our agitation, and I was dead beat when I got back to the hut.

I stood on the threshold of the room which we had made into a hospital, dreading to see the rigid outline of a marble form under a sheet; but, to my infinite relief, I saw Mackenzie kneeling beside the bed, and holding the sick man's wrist, with head bent and close attention.

I sank on to the rough bench by the wall, exhausted by the hurried pace at which I had walked the last mile, leaving Stormont to follow me at his own steady tramp.

Mackenzie was watching his patient too intently to look up as I entered the hut.

"The end has not come?" I said.

"No, this is not the end. It is more like the beginning," he answered, in a low voice, still looking up.

I was thunderstruck, and my heart beat with a sudden hope. I asked him if he saw a chance of his patient's recovery.

"An hour ago he was sinking," Mackenzie answered. "I measured his life by moments; the pulse was the thinnest thread, which I could scarcely feel under my fingers. I had

heard the death-rattle in his throat. I had seen every sign of dissolution, and I was prepared for the end. I was worn out with watching, and as I sat beside him, with my fingers on his wrist, in those moments which I thought his last, waiting to close his eyes, I may have dozed a little, the sort of half-sleep that comes from a tired brain. I had taken care to keep the fire going strong; but in that hour an icy blast had crept into the hut, and I started out of that short lapse of attention, frozen to the marrow. I have never, even in our Arctic weather, felt so fierce a grip of the cold. My hand had dropped from Mike's wrist, as I dozed, and I started awake, fully prepared to find lifeless clay lying on this bed. I thought his pulse had stopped for ever, and I found it beating strong and fast. His eyes looked at me with lightning in them. The life that had been so near extinction flamed up in him like a raging fire. I gave him a strong stimulant, but it seemed hardly needed. His pulse beat as no man's pulse that had been so near death ever beat within my experience; and it has been strong and steady ever since."

"It is a wonderful recovery," I said, thrilled with gladness at the strange news.

"It is a resurrection. It has made me think of Lazarus, coming out of the darkness in his grave-clothes. I tell you, Arden, this thing is little short of a miracle."

He spoke in a low voice, but he was greatly excited. I told him that I was hardly surprised, knowing the physical power, the exceptional vitality of the man.

"Yes, it is vitality," he said; "some electrical force that is beyond my diagnosis. Physical power was worn out, the lungs are badly damaged; but there must be some force of will, some hidden spring in the life of the man, that I cannot understand."

He seemed agitated, perplexed by so mysterious a recovery. He is a young man of keen intelligence, loving his profession ardently, an enthusiast in the search for truth, and for the further development of medical science. Often and often since that night of wonder he has recurred to the subject, and always with the same air of perplexity, and even distress, as if the wonder of the thing preyed upon his mind.

For my own part, till Michael was about again, after an

interval of three weeks, during which Mackenzie insisted upon keeping him in a state of absolute quiescence, building up the shattered frame with unwavering care, till our lives resumed our former course, and Michael and I became again comrades, working shoulder to shoulder in the day's labour, I had no feeling but gladness. The man I had liked and esteemed, the trusted companion who had helped me to forget my sorrows and to amass a fortune, that must needs make for usefulness and comfort, this man had been snatched from the jaws of death and given back to me, when I had thought him vanished out of my life for ever. How could I be otherwise than glad?

Yet, after we had been together for little more than a week, that gladness had given place to a strange feeling of distrust, of something that was almost horror. I felt uneasy in the man's company; his voice jarred my nerves, that full strong voice, with its north-country accent, that I had once liked; his face, in which no feature was altered, had undergone a subtle change of expression which made it not the same face. I looked at him and studied his countenance line by line, with a deliberate scrutiny. All the familiar lines were there, but the countenance repelled me. I began to make excuses for keeping aloof from my old comrade. I questioned Stormont, who owned that he too thought Michael had grown dull and heavy since his illness. I questioned Mackenzie, but could get no explanation from him. He repeated that the man's recovery was almost a miracle, and that he could not pretend to explain the fact.

Well, we worked together, we four comrades, and added day by day to our pile of treasure, knowing that the vein we had struck was almost inexhaustible, and that when our time came to leave the Yukon basin, we should sell our claims for a sum that would be in itself a fortune. Our luck was known at Dawson City and at Forty Mile Camp, and we had plenty of offers for the claims.

As time went on, I became conscious of other changes in Michael Dartnell's character—changes always for the worse. Hitherto, while working with indomitable energy, he had never shown the greed of gain. He had piled up his fortune almost unawares, moved by the spirit of adventure, and the desire to excel, rather than by the thirst for gold; and the

fortune having accumulated itself as it were automatically, all his thoughts about its disposal were unselfish thoughts. But since his escape from the jaws of the grave, we saw a new spirit in him, the fierce desire to amass wealth, to build a mountain of gold. In every attribute the man was changed. The spirit of indomitable energy which we had all admired in him, the mastery of character which had annihilated all differences of caste and had made him our leader, now took the form of absolute ferocity, a savage determination to do better than any of us, and to see his own pile bigger than ours at the end of the day's labour.

More than once have I heard Stormont remonstrate with him in his easy-going way.

"I say, old chap, when you elbow and shove like a maniac, and look as if you would like to trample us all down, you forget that we're a joint-stock company, and that it's against the spirit of trade-unions for one man to work harder than the rest."

His only answer was a scowl, and a lightning flash from the steel-grey eyes; and the elbowing and pushing, the determination to be first with his load for the rocker, went on with unabated force.

But if he had the miser's mania for amassing wealth, he showed also the prodigal's passion for squandering it.

At the end of every three days he insisted on a division of the spoil, and on the fourth day he was off with his bag of gold-dust to Forty Mile Creek, where we heard of him afterwards, drinking whisky at four dollars a bottle, dancing with squaws, and playing poker in a miner's cabin, from sundown till daybreak. He would come back after his debauch, sullen and silent, would tell us nothing of his adventures, and would resume his work, in the same dogged determination to show himself our superior.

"Your *protégé* has all the vices," Stormont said to me; "and I begin to think he must have been playing a part up to the time of his illness; and, since then, finding us all so weak about him, and so ready to let him take the lead, he has dropped his mask, and shown us what an arrogant bully your proletarian can be when he gets the upper hand."

For my own part, I was greatly distressed by the change in the man, disappointed, perplexed; for I had believed

in Michael Dartnell; had believed that here was a transparent soul, free from falsehood and cant, no psalm-singing hypocrite, no fawning scoundrel trading upon sham piety; but a man who had sinned and suffered, a man who had loved nobly, and had been cruelly wronged, and whose remorse had been profound and bitter, a life's lesson of the hardest kind.

I had seen the man's mind expand in his hourly intercourse with his superiors in education and refinement, and had seen that while we had enjoyed better opportunities, he was the better man. It was a hard blow to find myself so deceived, and to have to admit that the humble friend I had cherished was unworthy of my regard, an impostor, whose presence in our little band made for evil.

For myself, I cannot tell you how intense was the change in my sensations, mental and physical, in relation to this man. I found myself shrinking from him with absolute loathing. His touch sent a shudder through my veins. The labour that I had relished, the cheerful evenings round the log-fire, the exploring tramps over mountain or wood, our expeditions in quest of game, our fishing-parties, all became hateful to me because of Michael's presence. He poisoned the air I breathed. His sardonic laughter, always loudest in any hour of trouble, at any news of accident, sickness, or death, from the other mining-camps, rang through my brain like the laughter of fiends in hell. His presence conjured up all the hideous images that I had ever read of in prose or verse—all that my memory held of the unearthly and the Satanic.

The time came when I felt that I could endure this torment no longer; and I told my friends, Stormont and Mackenzie, that I had made as big a pile as I wanted, and was beginning to suffer from home sickness, so had made up my mind to take the first steamer for St. Michael. I was not afraid of the long, slow journey down the Yukon, as it would give me just the interval of perfect rest and dull monotony that I needed.

Michael heard me make this announcement in silence, but I saw an angry fire in the brilliant eyes under scowling brows, the eyes which had so altered in expression since his recovery that it was difficult to believe that the calm

steadfast eyes I remembered so well in the beginning of my acquaintance with the East End iron-worker could be the same as these orbs that flashed fire at anything that vexed the brain behind them. The others remonstrated, and neither of them guessed the reason of my falling away. For them the change in Michael's character was perplexing and unpleasant, but it caused them no distress of mind. He was a good worker, and they accepted his alteration in mood and manner as only one more disillusion among the many deceptions and disappointments of this mortal life.

Michael was missing next day, the division of spoil having been made overnight, this bi-weekly reckoning of our gains being a new order of things which had been forced upon us by him. We knew he had gone to Forty Mile Camp, as his custom was; and we took a holiday during his absence, and gave ourselves up to such sport as the region afforded—hunting cariboo, shooting water-fowl, enjoying the luxury of long hours of rest by the log-fire, talking, reading, playing chess, writing home letters, Mackenzie deep in medical books, always intent on his next examination.

On the third day of Michael's disappearance a party of miners came along, on their way to explore for new claims farther north on the Porcupine river, and from them we heard an appalling account of our partner's conduct at Forty Mile, conduct so outrageous as to scandalize the rough company assembled there, for the most part men whose tongues were the worst things about them, and who had a rough honesty in their dealings with one another which made life possible in that wild region. He had found his chosen circle among the vilest characters, the little knot of cheats and profligates who were the exception in the mining fraternity, the outcasts of all nations, the offscouring of the human race. With these he had abandoned himself to debauchery, steeped in alcohol, brawling, blaspheming, with knife or revolver always ready, a terror even to the wretches with whom he associated, and only tolerated on account of the gold which he flung about him with mad recklessness.

I brooded over this hideous account, and the man being absent, and I therefore being free from that physical loathing which I had of late suffered in all contact with him, my

mind travelled back to those happy days when I was working in the East End in the dear company of an angel of charity, and I thought of Michael as I had known him then, so fine a character, so noble an example of the man for whom nature had done much and fortune nothing. I remembered his respect for Rachel, and how he had submitted himself to her gentle influence; and I thought how it would grieve that pure spirit to know of his degradation and ruin, which for her, who saw in the earthly form the tabernacle of an imperishable soul, meant so much more than any human creature's fate could mean for me, the materialist.

For her sake, repulsive as the enterprise was, I resolved to make one supreme effort to drag the profligate out of the pit of infamy, to bring him back to a remembrance of the man he had been. The link between him and me in his better mood had been much stronger and closer than his association with Stormont or Mackenzie. He had been, or had seemed to be, my devoted friend, and had given me the impression of an exaggerated gratitude for the little I had done for him. He used to declare that I had lifted him out of the slough of despond, brought him into a new world, given him new hopes and ambitions, and for the first time since the tragedy of his life had made him acquainted with happiness. Yet, since he had risen from the bed of death, restored by one of nature's miracles, I had seen something in the man's bearing towards myself that betrayed hatred, a vindictive and malignant hatred, which threatened to break out into outrage and personal violence at the first flash of angry fire, the first conflict of will against will. Marked as was the change in his character in all respects, it was most obvious in his relations with me.

For Rachel's sake I conquered the feeling of intense disgust with which the new man had inspired me, and I made the journey to Forty Mile, in an open boat navigated by a couple of Indians, intent upon saving him from his own folly and his own vices, if his redemption were possible.

Though it is my misfortune to disbelieve in any higher life than that we live here, I do at least believe in the dignity of manhood, the preciousness of mind and heart, and all that constitutes human character; and I have always

held it man's sacred duty to save his fellow-man from degradation and misery.

I need not enter into the details of the scenes I beheld at the Miner's Camp. In a community where the virtues of a rough and ready life, the honour and kindly feeling between man and man were the rule, Michael Dartnell had chosen his companions among the dregs of humanity, just those few choice scoundrels, the pariahs, the moral lepers, who were shunned like a pestilence by every honest adventurer, thieves, liars, reprobates, who had come to Alaska not to labour, but to rob, to lie in wait for other men's gains, to lure the successful miner into their lair and strip him of his fortune, cozen him out of his gold, and educate him in drunkenness and devilry.

I found Michael enthroned like Beelzebub in a company of fiends, worshipped for the sake of the gold he had scattered among them. I dragged him, helpless with drink, out of this hell in little, and took him to the cabin of a man I knew, who gave me the hospitality of a room for twenty-four hours; and here I left my besotted *protégé* under lock and key, to sleep off the effects of a week's intoxication, while I went to Dawson City to buy stores for our camp. He bore my rough treatment with a sullen indifference, his brain clouded by drink, his physical force paralyzed for the time being; and his infamous comrades, knowing that his pockets were empty, offered no opposition. They saw me drag him away with mocking laughter and coarse gibes. If I had come for his swag, I was a day after the fair, they said. Goliath was generous to the pals he liked; and there was nothing left for his mates down the river, whom he hated. This was what one of them told me. They called him Goliath, the name which he had given himself at Forty Mile.

The brief Alaskan summer had begun, and the rivers and lakes were open. Michael made no objection to the return journey in the boat with the Indians. He had slept off the worst effects of his debauch, after a day and night of sleep that was like stupor. I spent the morning before our homeward journey in serious and kindly talk with him. I reminded him of our old friendship, how I had taken him to my heart almost as a brother. I told him that it was for Rachel's

sake I was making this last endeavour to drag him out of the mire, to win him back to the reputable and worthy life he had been leading before his illness. He heard me in a stubborn silence; and there was a malignity in his clouded eyes and iron mouth that chilled me. I appealed to his friendship, to pleasant memories of days gone by; and I saw hate, ungovernable hate, in his countenance.

Still, as he expressed his willingness to go back with me, I considered that there was something gained; so we left the friendly community at the miners' city and started on our river voyage, with wind and current in our favour, and the first day's voyage was an easy one, Michael lying half asleep at the bottom of the boat, and I having nothing to do but watch the hills and the sky, the dark pine woods, and the distant snow-peaks, while the Indians sailed our boat.

We landed at nightfall in a sheltered spot, and slept on the bank, rolled in our blankets, by a large log-fire, which the Indians were to keep burning all night. I had been a very bad sleeper of late, and though I was dog tired after the long journey up-stream, and the excitement of my encounter with Michael, sleep was impossible for the first three hours of the short summer night, and I lay on my bed of river-reeds and long rank grass, watching the stars moving in slow majesty across the steel-blue vault, and thinking sad thoughts of the things that might have been, and were not, and perhaps could never be. It was only on the edge of morning, when a cold grey glimmer behind the crest of the eastern hills broke through the purple night, that I felt myself drifting to the haven of sleep, faintly conscious of the cool wind and the fierce glow of the wood-fire. I slept soundly for a couple of hours, and the snow-peaks were glittering in the risen sun when I awoke and stared at the river and the pine wood on the farther shore, for the moment surprised at not finding myself under the rough ceiling of our cabin.

Memory returned in a flash, and I looked for Michael. He was lying like a log along the hollow in the bank, on his bed of rushes; but the Indians, who had stretched themselves a few paces off, in front of the fire, were gone.

I sprang up and looked about for them, called and whistled my loudest, but there was no reply. Michael shook off his blanket, rose and stretched his long limbs,

looking at me with that darkling glance which was so unlike the old Michael.

"The Indians are gone," he said. "I sent them packing, an hour ago. They have started for Dawson City across the hills."

"What made you send them away?"

"First, because we don't want them for the down-river journey."

"We want them to portage our stores past the Needle Rapids."

"We can manage that without them. I had another reason for getting rid of them. I wanted to be alone with you. Do you know that you and I have never been alone since—I got well?"

He paused before the last three words — paused and smiled, as if at some hidden thought.

"We have been together in friendly company."

"Yes, but not alone, man to man, face to face, like two men who meet and measure their strength, alone betwixt earth and sky, alone as fast friends like to be. And what can be a fitter opportunity than this—when we have fifty miles of the river before us, and not a human habitation within those fifty miles, and when you have taken a world of trouble on my account, the trouble to reclaim me—to make a Christian of me, like the good Christian you are."

"I don't pretend to be a Christian; but I wanted to do all I could for you, because of our past friendship—in the days when I think you liked me, Michael, and for the sake of that pure and beneficent woman, who believes that man has a higher destiny than the struggle for life here. It was for Rachel Lorimer's sake more than for yours that I made a last effort to save you. I could not see you drifting to destruction without trying my best for you."

He laughed aloud, a laugh that grated on my nerves, and made me loathe him.

"Drifting to destruction!" he echoed scornfully. "Obeying my own instincts, you mean; the instinct that craves excitement, movement, mastery of men; the instinct that thirsts for pleasure; the instincts that make the thing you call a man's soul. My soul wanted strong drink, cards, dice, the company of wild women. You call that drifting

to destruction. I call it living; and while there is breath in my nostrils I intend to live."

"You mean that you will go back to that pandemonium?"

"Yes, when I have more gold to spend there."

"You know that your companions care only for your gold?"

"I know that every man lives for himself, fights for his own hand. No matter to me how base the creatures are, if they amuse me. I buy them, as I buy food and drink. I buy them at the market price, and use them for my pleasure."

No words can describe the revolting cynicism, the arrogance of his tone, nor the strangeness of such a tone in the man whom I had first known as the preacher of man's equal rights, the sacred duty of man towards his fellow-man, to help, to cure, to educate, to upraise.

"The Michael I knew is dead," I thought; and as the words shaped themselves in my mind, a strange agitation overcame me.

We were in the boat, drifting with the current, Michael sprawling in the bows, a big cigar between his lips, his head lying against a sack of household stores that I had bought at Dawson City. I was sitting in the stern, steering, a task that needed experience and keen attention, for there were many dangerous rocks in the river, hidden at this season, when the snow that came down from the hills in frequent avalanches had raised the level of the water.

"The Michael I knew is dead."

The words repeated themselves in my mind in the summer stillness, and seemed to me like a revelation from some power outside myself. To me, an unbeliever in the supernatural, it seemed as if from some higher and more spiritual source I had been suddenly made acquainted with the truth.

"The Michael I knew is dead." This reprobate and scoffer, this drunkard and profligate, who had risen up from Michael's sick-bed, who wore Michael's form and features, this was not the man I had known and esteemed, my trusted companion and friend, the man by whose side I have lain down to rest by night and risen in the morning, sure of a

dog-like fidelity, knowing that if I missed him for an hour he was employed in some good service for me or for my friends.

The Michael I knew was dead; the ebbing pulse, the last long sighs which Mackenzie had recorded, had indeed been the end. The life that flamed up in the prostrate form like a raging fire was not *his* life. A new creature had risen from that bed of death; a creature whose instincts were wholly evil, and who was my deadly foe. I felt as he lay there in the bottom of the boat, taciturn, supine, and seemingly harmless, that I was in the presence of an implacable enemy.

I cannot describe the horror and agony of mind that had come upon me with that revelation. All the suffering of the time that followed Manville's death, the subtle sense of evil haunting and overshadowing my life, came back, and I sat with my hand upon the tiller, guiding our course automatically, my brain frozen, my limbs seeming numbed and lifeless, like humanity turned to stone. I can but wonder that I was able to keep the boat off the rocks as long as I did.

My automatic steering failed at last, and had nearly grounded us upon a long strip of an eyot, when the man started up, nearly capsizing the boat, and pushed himself into my place, lifting me from my seat and thrusting me towards the bows.

"You can't steer in your sleep, mate," he said, snatching the tiller; "lie down and keep quiet. I know the river better than you do."

I knew that there was danger in the man's company, foresaw some stroke of fate, in a vague, dim way; but I had a feeling of not caring, an indifference to the evil that threatened; and I lay down in the bottom of the boat, just where my enemy had been lying, and abandoned myself to the overpowering force of sleep—the sleep I had been longing for as the worn-out wayfarer longs for a place of rest, as the parched lips long for a cool drink.

Ten miles or so from the mouth of the creek to which we were bound, the river narrows suddenly, and takes an acute bend between a cleft of the hills, a dangerous bit of navigation known as the Needle Rapids, on account of the

rock splinters that rise sharp and straight out of the white water.

In passing this spot we had always unloaded our boat and carried everything over the trail to the foot of the waterfall. Before I gave myself up to sleep, I urged Michael to keep a sharp look-out for the bend of the river above the rapids, which was masked by a jutting spur of the hills. I calculated that we were within an hour of the perilous spot, and I begged him to wake me in good time to help in the task of landing our stores, and guiding the empty boat over the rough water without damage from the rocks.

I am a light sleeper by habit, but I think my brain was worn out by the worry and perplexity of mind which I had suffered for a long time. I know that I never tasted the luxury of sleep as I tasted it in that hour, sleep so profound, so restful, yet through which there was a subconsciousness of the sweet soft air and monotonous ripple of the stream; sleep without a dream, yet with a vague sense of some great joy, a love that I had longed for and been denied, now given me in full measure, the sense of bliss not to be defined.

My waking was swift and terrible. The boat swerved suddenly, and I awoke with a thrill of fear, and saw a murderer's eyes staring into mine, a murderer's arm lifted to strike. I sprang to my feet before the flashing knife came down, and fought for my life. Unarmed, helpless in the grasp of a Hercules, I made a fierce resistance to a fate that seemed inevitable. I seized the arm that held the knife, and hung on to it with all my weight, and with the strength of desperation, while the boat rocked from side to side; but the battle was only of moments, the knife, was plunged into my breast while my grasp was still upon the murderer's arm, and I dropped like a log at his feet. And now the boat was drifting fast upon a hurrying stream, and had drifted faster with every moment of that wild struggle, as if the water took its velocity from our fierce passion, and hurried as our pulses hurried in the murderous strife.

A dreamlike feeling came over me as I lay in the bottom of the boat, savage eyes glaring down at me, the

murderer's hand ready to strike the *coup de grace*. I felt the blood rushing from my side, and thought I was dying. Before all things faded from my sight, I saw a sudden change in the face of my foe.

"The white water!" he cried, with a blasphemous oath; and then I felt as if I was being hurled through space, swung round and round in a vortex of wild water, and the rest was darkness, till I woke in our cabin thirty miles from the Needle Rapids.

Some Indians had pitched their tents at the entrance to the cañon, and had been watching our boat, and had dragged me out of the water at the foot of the rapids, when I was flung, bruised and bleeding and senseless, almost at their feet.

One of them was a man who had worked with us, and he made his way by the river and creek to our camp, to carry the news to my friends. The others brought me back to life, but not to consciousness; and many days and nights of fever and pain had to pass before I knew where I was lying, or remembered what manner of man I was.

My enemy was never seen after that brief vision of an uplifted arm and a flashing knife, which the Indians described to Stormont and Mackenzie with a few words of broken English, and a good deal of energetic pantomime. The white water had swept him from their ken as the empty boat crashed bottom upwards among the jagged rocks, and that strong frame, with all its capacity for evil, was carried to unknown depths.

I have now only one desire, and that grows keener with every slow hour of convalescence. I am longing for England, and the faces of the friends I left there. I shall go back broken in health, shaken in mind, a bundle of nerves, and haunting thoughts; but to see the fields and hedgerows, the village greens and thatched gables of that little friendly world of England, after the monotonous grandeur of Alaskan snow-mountains, ought to be enough for peace.

And I may see Rachel again, may taste the sweetness of her Divine pity. I rejected her friendship with passionate scorn when she denied me her love. I swore that she could be nothing to me if she were not all. But I have grown

humbler in these years of severance. I can sue to her, *in formâ pauperis*, for the charity of a kind word, a friendly look from the eyes I love. I think I could school myself to be her lieutenant, to work for her and obey her, and keep every impassioned thought in check, so that she should forget I ever asked her for more than friendship. With her as the ruler of my life, my gold will be a precious possession, every ounce of yellow ore a means of help and comfort for humanity. Without her aid I fear the springs of action would be weak, and all I attempted would lack purpose, and that Divine patience under discouragement which is the supreme attribute of the Believer.

I will write to you from England, my dear friend, if I live to return to the old scenes. My quiet bachelor lodgings and the books I love are waiting for me in the narrow street behind the church.

Ever yours,
WALTER ARDEN.

XV.

The joy which Walter Arden hoped to feel in the sight of familiar things, the quiet fields and hills and woodlands, the sober old homesteads and cosy villages between Southampton and London, and even in his own library, was lessened by the state of physical prostration in which he landed from the American liner that brought him from New York. Throughout the homeward pilgrimage by river and sea, by rail and steamer, he had been carefully tended by Alick Mackenzie and Archer Stormont; but the rallying power which he had shown immediately after the healing of his wound had failed mysteriously before the band left Dawson City in the steamer for St. Michael, carrying their fortunes with them in strong iron-bound chests. Mackenzie hoped that restful days on river and sea would have restored his strength; but the listlessness and apathy continued, and he was in weaker health when he landed at Southampton than when he left the gold-fields. The motive power of existence seemed broken; and when his friends had seen him established in his old rooms, with his old servant in attendance upon him, he sank down into a languid endurance of life, caring for nothing, hoping for nothing. Even his books had lost their charm, nor could the old or the new things in literature—neither the book beloved of mankind for two thousand years, nor the book that had taken the town by storm yesterday—bring him relief from the haunting memory of those last months on the Yukon, and the mysterious change in Michael Dartnell's character.

His landlady ministered to him with an almost maternal tenderness, employing all the resources of her culinary art to tempt an invalid appetite, but with scant success. Her mourning-gown told him of her sorrow, even before her trembling lips broke into speech.

"Oh, sir, there is no one in the little parlour now—the room that we made so pretty, with your kind help. I keep the door locked, and no one goes there but me, to dust the furniture and air the room. The pretty things are all there; her bust of Byron, and his portrait that Lady Mary gave her, and her books, and the flower-vases. I put a few flowers there every Sunday; for, though it may be foolish of me, I can't help thinking that her spirit may haunt the room where she spent so many quiet hours."

"Was she long ill?"

"No, sir; I think I may say she was never ill. I thank God for that in the midst of my sorrow. She suffered neither sickness nor pain; she just drooped and drooped, all through last autumn, and seemed a shade weaker every day. I had the best of doctors for her, thanks to your kind sister, who came to see her ever so many times, and took her in her own carriage to her own physician; but he didn't pretend he could do anything to lengthen her life. He gave her a prescription, and she took the medicine, and seemed to rally just a little; but she was fading away all the time. Her life was ebbing from her slowly and gently, like the tide going out."

"Did her mind seem stronger towards the last?"

"No, sir; she was always the same, except that those dreadful thoughts of hell-fire and fiends and the bottomless pit seem to have left her. She was happy in her pretty romantic way, as she used to be before that trouble came upon her. She would talk of Byron, and shed tears over his early death, when he was fighting the Greeks—or fighting for the Greeks, was it? Poor child, how she adored his lordship! She had his picture propped up beside her bed in the last days, when she was too weak to hold up her head, and she died in her sleep, without so much as one troubled sigh, with her face turned towards his face; and I wondered if his spirit knew of the love of one simple low-born girl, given to him more than seventy years after they laid him in his grave."

"I'm afraid your life must seem sad and empty since your loss, my dear Mrs. Berry," Arden said gently.

"Oh, Mr. Arden, I feel as if my heart, and all the hopes I ever had in this life, were locked up with the pictures and

books in that little room. If I had only this life to think about—well, I believe I should just walk down to Westminster bridge, in the dead of some dark night, and drop quietly over the parapet. One drowned woman more or less would make no difference in this big city. But I look forward to the life to come, when I shall find my poor ruined girl again among the souls of the redeemed, whose sins are washed white in the blood of the Lamb. I cannot fly in the face of my Creator, Mr. Arden, and forfeit my hope of life eternal, and reunion with my girl."

The fervour of her words, and the exalted look in the poor plain face, touched him deeply. Yes, this was the only possible consolation for the bereaved, the sure and certain hope of reunion in the life to come.

He remembered Rachel's words, "What could I say to them, how could I comfort them, if I did not believe in the life after death?"

Arden called in Carlton House Terrace on the day after his return. He had just strength to get into a hansom and let himself be driven where he wanted to go, looking with uncaring eyes at the houses and the people he passed, and with the dreamlike half-alive feeling of extreme weakness.

Disappointment awaited him. Mr. Lorimer was in Central America; Mrs. and Miss Lorimer were at Harrogate. He went back to Jermyn Street feeling that the town was empty of all human interest.

Lady Mary Selby called upon him on the following day.

"Mrs. Berry told me you were coming home on the *Boston*," she said; "but I think you might have written to me before you left Klondyke. Only one shabby letter in more than two years!"

"I had so little to write about."

"So little? In a life of adventure!"

"Would you have relished descriptions of snow-mountains and lakes? I know you care only about people; and there were no people, from your point of view, between San Francisco and the Yukon."

"You might have written about yourself."

"I had nothing satisfactory to tell you."

"Then your expedition has been a failure?"

"Something of a failure."

"No gold?"

"Gold? Oh yes, plenty of gold. I believe I am richer by a quarter of a million or so."

"A quarter of a million! Do you call that failure? Why, my husband is quite jubilant when he has made a quarter of a million, as he did the week before last, by the boom in mineral oils."

"I know. He calls it another milestone on the road to a modest competence. I have heard him. But I did not go to the North-West for the sake of the gold; I went to forget things."

"And have you forgotten?"

"Nothing."

"I'm glad you have not forgotten Rachel Lorimer."

"If you love me, you ought to be sorry. But it was something to find that she is still Rachel Lorimer."

"And will be to the end of the chapter, I believe, unless you can make her change her mind."

"I cannot hope to do that, unless I could change my mind."

"And is your mind still the same?"

"Yes; the light that shines into her life has not come into mine."

"How can you hope for it if you won't even go to church?"

"You think church would convert me—to sit in a row of close-packed human beings, and listen to the pious banalities of a popular preacher, to hear fifty-two sermons a year, of which perhaps two would appeal to my reason or touch my heart."

"If you went to hear the right preachers, you would end by being convinced."

"My dear Mary, if Rachel's perfect life cannot convince me, there is no hope for my salvation; not even in a miracle. But tell me about yourself. You look younger and handsomer and happier than when we parted."

"Yes, I am happier. I have been enjoying my trivial life. The only way to be happy is to be trivial—to enjoy the present moment, and to value the things one has. My parties were among the most successful of the season. I

had the best home and foreign royalties, and all the pretty people, and all the clever people—I mean all the people who have done things within the year—books, or pictures, or flying-machines, or scientific discoveries."

"And how do you come to be in town in October?"

"Oh, the usual business—to buy things. We have been on Selby's Moor, and we came from Scotland in his motor-car. There were three break-downs, and I had to stand shivering on a lonely high-road while the wretched thing was mended. I shall travel by rail in future. If one has to wear ugly clothes and goggles, the motor isn't good enough. Picture a honeymoon couple!—'the bride's going-away toilet was a mackintosh coat and smoked spectacles.'"

"How long shall you be in town?"

"As long as I find London the pleasantest place in the world. But I want to hear more about you, Walter. You are looking dreadfully ill. You must have worn yourself out in that horrid Arctic region."

"No, no; the Arctic region is not to blame."

"What was the matter, then? You are looking ten years older than when you left England. There must be some reason."

"Yes, there is a reason. I have been through tragic experiences, things I cannot talk about—yet awhile."

"I won't worry you. But I hope you will see my pet doctor, who will set you right very soon."

And Lady Mary urged the merits of the last fashionable physician, the man whom everybody insisted upon as the one infallible healer.

"You must see him at once—to-morrow morning. You must write immediately for an appointment."

"My case is not so desperate. I am suffering from a kind of reaction, and I only want rest. Just to lie back in my chair half asleep, with a book dropping out of my hand."

"That is not enough. He will send you somewhere——"

"I shall ask him to send me to Harrogate."

"Ah, then you know that Rachel is there?"

"Yes; I was told she was there. But I hope she has not been ill."

"No. They are there for her mother's rheumatism."

"Then I would consent to Harrogate, if your physician should send me there. But I have no hope, Mary—no hope of anything better than to be Rachel's friend and helper."

Arden promised to consult the great man without delay, but on the next morning he was too ill to leave his bed, and his servant sent for the general practitioner who had the honour of attending Mrs. Berry's lodgers, whether lords or commoners, and who had been a kind friend to Lisbeth till her last hour.

He found the patient suffering from no specific disease, but in a state of extreme prostration, and with a good deal of fever. He ordered perfect rest and careful nursing—a trained nurse to assist Martin the valet.

Lady Mary came on the following afternoon, and insisted on a consultation with the oracle from Cavendish Square, to which the Jermyn Street practitioner politely assented, and had the satisfaction of finding his opinion confirmed and his treatment approved.

"Mr. Arden must have passed through great suffering, mental as well as physical," the physician said to Lady Mary, after the consultation. "I suppose you know that he has been badly wounded—a stab from a knife or dagger, which narrowly missed his heart?"

"No; I know nothing."

"Mr. Wellborough found the scar when sounding him. It must have been a severe wound, only just missing a vital point, and recent; certainly within the last six months."

"Can he have been fighting a duel?"

"No, no; the wound could not have been made by a small sword. The scar indicates the blade of a knife or dagger. Mr. Arden has had a narrow escape."

Walter Arden, Jermyn Street, London, to Douglas Campbell, Leith, Tasmania.

November 30th, 189-.

My dear Douglas,

I promised to write to you as soon as I arrived in London; but you know the proverb, *Mann denkt, Gott lenkt.* I have been in this house nearly two months, and

for much of that time life has been a blank, or I have been dwelling in a world of my own, where all things were strange and incredible, and only within the last week have I again become a reasonable being, conscious of the world in which I live; conscious, and happy with an ineffable happiness, having by means of my very weakness and piteous condition won the prize which was denied to my passionate pleading in the days of my strength.

I will not trouble you with the details of my illness, for it was almost a repetition of the long period of fever and weakness which I suffered in the log cabin after my wound. Fever and delirium; long days in which life trembled in that fine balance with which the doctor weighs his patient's chances; and then a slow rallying, a gradual return to the consciousness of the life around me, in which the simple furniture of my bedroom ceased to present itself under all manner of horrible or grotesque shapes, and became again familiar objects—a wardrobe on the right, a dressing-table on the left, the sofa, the mantelpiece—all so commonplace and soothingly peaceful after the labyrinths in which I had lost myself, the catacombs where I had walked for weary hours clutching an expiring candle, the submarine ships in which I had panted for breath, the Siberian dungeons, the Thibetan monasteries. Only the common everyday world; but what bliss to find it again, after being lost among the spectral terrors of delirium.

That was my faithful servant quietly sweeping the hearth and replenishing the fire; and the comfortable-looking middle-aged woman standing by my bed was my nurse.

But the angel—who had looked down upon me sometimes, radiant with a divine light, in the midst of scenes of terror—where was she?

I asked what had become of the angel, but the nurse thought I was delirious still, and only murmured some soothing recommendation to take the prescribed nourishment, and try to sleep. I had no power to persist. I was weaker than an infant, and fell into a kind of half sleep, while the nurse arranged my pillows. It was the first sleep that brought me comfort since the beginning of my illness. I slept till the short winter day was done, and awoke to find

my room lighted dimly by a pair of candles on a table at some distance from my bed.

There were two women in the room. One was sitting in the large armchair by the fire, in bonnet and mantle. I could not see her face. The other was sitting by my bed, bareheaded, the candlelight shining on soft brown hair and the loveliest eyes in the world.

"Rachel!"

Yes; it was Rachel. I stretched out my hand, and it was clasped in hers, and I heard a stifled sob before she spoke.

"Mother and I are so glad you are better," she said quietly. "We have been to see you every day; but you did not know us."

"I knew that an angel looked down at me sometimes—that the gates of heaven opened for an instant, and that I looked and saw an angel, while I was lying in the depths of hell."

"Ah, now you are talking as if you were delirious again. There were two of your angels—mother was always with me."

"Dear, dear Mrs. Lorimer," I said.

She came over and sat by me, and held my other hand, and I lay thus between these dear women, mother and daughter, and I knew that all I had ever suffered of sorrow on earth was outweighed a hundred-fold by the bliss that was granted to me.

Rachel loved me. The dear hand that clasped mine, with a warmer clasp than ever friend gave to friend, was my assurance of her love. It scarcely needed our quiet talk next day, when Mrs. Lorimer left us for a brief span, which she spent with my sister in the library, to convince me of my happiness.

I asked her if she would trust her life to me, if she would believe in my reverence for the religion she loved, because it was hers, and that no act or word of mine should ever attack her faith.

"I must believe, I must hope, and go on hoping, that in His own good time God will give you the faith that makes life on earth worth living——"

And then she told me how unhappy she had been when she knew that I had left England for the wild life on the

Yukon, and that she had made me an exile, and had sent me to face hardships and dangers that might end in death. She had acted from a sense of duty. She had sacrificed her love for her faith; but when the deed was done, she repented, and began to doubt if she had chosen the best course, if a truly religious woman would not have accepted the risk from which she had recoiled, and devoted herself to the man she loved, trusting to the Divine guidance to bring him to the true faith.

"The faith that can move mountains will surely help me to lead one good man into the light," she said, with the simplicity which makes her belief in the spiritual world so lovely and so pathetic to an unbeliever like me.

She is mine, Douglas, this adorable creature whose presence has for me been like the coming of sunshine into a place of darkness. She will trust her life to me, and every hope, every desire, every thought of mine, will be centred in her. Henceforth her lightest wish will be my law. I shall live only to adore and to obey her. Her coming has routed all the brood of evil.

In ineffable, in unmerited bliss,

I sign myself your faithful friend,

WALTER ARDEN.

XVI.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Arden had been married three years, and the only cloud upon their wedded happiness was the shadow left by the loss of their only child, a son whose life upon this planet had lasted something less than half a year.

"He is waiting for us in heaven," his mother said sometimes, when her husband surprised her in tears, and knew that they were shed for the one sorrow of her life.

A child under six months is hardly a sentient being to the indifferent observer. It is a creature to be cherished by an overpaid nurse, and wheeled about in a white chariot under an embroidered satin coverlet, and to be admired and gushed over by its mother's female friends, who would not recognize the thing they praise if they happened to meet it half an hour afterwards with somebody else's nurse.

But to one person upon earth—to the mother—there is a world of thought and meaning in those starry eyes; and every gesture of the delicate limbs, and every vague sweet smile on the roseate face, has its significance. Rachel had worshipped her infant son, not to the neglect of the unfortunate and the unhappy, for all the business of philanthropy had gone on uninterruptedly during his little life; but looking back on that brief span of exquisite happiness, which seemed a life apart, a life in which he was, she felt that all her thoughts had centred in her child, that she had made him her idol, to the forgetfulness of other women's children—the ill-nurtured, sickly little ones at the *crèche*, who, from her own point of view, had as strong a claim on her as her own very son—the claim of "the least of these," imposed upon her by her Saviour.

He had been taken from her. Was it a lesson for the unregenerate heart? She stood beside his grave with her husband, the grave in a rural churchyard, far from the smoke and din of cities, which was to be her own and her husband's resting-place in the days to come, the last home, amidst scenes of peacefulness and woodland beauty, which they had chosen for their beloved. She stood by the open grave, with Arden's hand clasped in hers, and her thoughts soared from the coffin and the clay to that new life which her child was living, and which to her seemed so much the more certain and assured because of this little life that had flickered into darkness here, to shine among God's populace of radiant faces, in the light of the Lamb.

In all their after-talk of the son they had laid asleep in the Berkshire churchyard, she never questioned her husband as to his faith in that celestial future where her missing treasure was to be given back to her. She spoke of her own hope as if it were a certainty; and only in the searching look of the lovely eyes did Arden see the doubt struggling with the hope that he too looked forward to the mystic reunion of spirit liberated from the bonds of flesh.

The sorrow was an old wound now, and the life flowed on in graciousness and peace, a life that meant incalculable good for others. Arden had associated himself and his fortune with all his wife's plans. She was his leader, his conscience, the better part of himself. If he could not be a Christian for her sake, he could at least be a philanthropist. They worked together. He understood all the business of charity, the accountancy, the supervision, all that needed a strong will and mind. He had a secretary who helped in the drudgery of correspondence and accounts, and the greater part of whose time was occupied in answering begging letters, or investigating the claims of the supplicants; but there was no part of the machine which his hand did not direct, no detail in which he was not personally interested.

When the question of her married home was mooted, Rachel proposed a house in one of the old squares, Bedford or Russell for choice, the largest house they could find, where there would be room for philanthropic tea-parties

after Mrs. Bellingham's pattern, where she would be out of the way of the fashionable world and its laborious culture of futile pleasures.

But Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer overruled this selection.

"If those old squares were the kind of places I remember when I was a boy, guarded by iron gates, remote, melancholy, slow, I would make no objection to your living there," Lorimer told his daughter, "but the noises and the traffic of our obstreperous modern London have burst the gates and spoilt the quiet. The flavour of the Georgian century is gone. Students and old-fashioned people have fled from the neighbourhood in despair. If you want quiet, you must live in the West End."

Mrs. Lorimer put in her plea. She wanted her daughter near her. That was essential. So a small house was found in a quiet little street near St. James's Palace, and within five minutes' walk of Carlton House Terrace. The house was small, but the rent was immense. All the resources of modern architecture had been brought to bear upon a prim square house of the early Victorian order, and it had been made eighteenth-century, with shallow bow windows, small panes, beaten iron-work and copper decorations, and quaintnesses of every kind. It was like that house in Arlington Street, of which it was said the owner ought to live over the way in order to look at it. Happily, the house was neat and pretty within as well as a thing of beauty outside; and Rachel was a woman as well as a philanthropist, and could not help loving her dainty home, with its white walls and gay floral chintzes, Louis-seize cabinets and tables, and choice water-colours, the gift of her adoring father.

The house had been furnished by Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer with a lavish outlay that had seemed sinful to Rachel, who could never withdraw her mind from those martyrs of poverty in the dark corners of the great city. But she submitted to the will of those she loved, from whom she had received boundless indulgence, and by whom she had been allowed freedom that is rarely granted to a rich man's daughter. She accepted the pretty house with a warm gratitude, but she resolutely refused the diamonds which her father wanted to give her. She had her pearls which had

been selected for shape and colour, two or three at a time, year after year, till the perfect necklace was complete. This necklace she loved for the love that had created it; but costliness in clothes or jewels in a general way was distasteful to her. A country vicar's daughter would have desired a more elaborate *trousseau* than Mr. Lorimer's heiress carried to her new home.

The cynical among her girl-friends declared that she affected this Spartan simplicity because she thought it accentuated her beauty, and was the only possible way of being original in a world where everybody of importance was dressed by the same people and with the same reckless expenditure.

"Her quakerish satin frock is more conspicuous in a crowd than all our furs and feathers," said one, "though it can't cost her more than fifteen pound."

"She has found out the exact hat that sets off her profile, and she makes a virtue of wearing it all through the season," said another.

Mrs. Walter Arden did not abjure society. She had youth and health. She was happily married, and the long days spent in going about doing good left her with a reserve of bright thoughts and gaiety for the evenings. She had her opera-box, a gift from her mother, and she went to all the evening parties, where the clever people—political, literary, or artistic—were to be met. She was oftener seen as Mrs. Arden than she had been as Miss Lorimer, for she enjoyed the independence of a married woman's position, and the knowledge that she was no longer a mark for the fortune-hunter. The attentions paid her now must be offered without any hidden motive. She was safe in the haven of a happy marriage, and knew that somewhere in the crowd her husband was waiting for the hour that would bring them back to the quiet house and the dual solitude they loved.

When the question of his daughter's marriage settlement was mooted, Mr. Lorimer heard of Arden's Klondyke fortune with unqualified astonishment.

"I didn't think you were the kind of man to make your pile," he said frankly. "I fancied you too much of a dreamer to pick up gold even if you found your way to

Tom Tiddler's ground. I could understand your being keen for the journey—your imagination fired by that restless chap, Stormont; but I expected to see you come home minus your travelling expenses, with a box of snap-shot films, and the materials for a book. *That's* all I expected for you out of the North-West."

"You see, I had better luck than I deserved."

"You mean that for once in a way personal merit was rewarded as richly as business capacity. Well, as you and our girl are a brace of philanthropists, I propose, with your leave, to tie up your two fortunes in such a manner that neither of you will have the power to chuck away the capital, while free to make East End ducks and drakes of the income."

"For my fortune, I lay it at Rachel's feet, to deal with as she pleases."

"At *my* feet, you mean, to deal with in a common-sense way for your mutual advantage. Rachel would throw the whole of it after the widow's mite."

"My dear friend, you must do what you think best. The money is there, valueless for me except as a means of carrying out Rachel's wishes."

"Yes, yes, I understand. Well, you can spend the best part of your income upon seaside camps and children's dinners; but I will take care the principal is under lock and key. You will bring two hundred and fifty thousand into settlement; I shall give Rachel the same amount. Your income from gilt-edged securities will be fifteen thousand a year. I hope that will be enough for a comfortable home, and for your 'poors,' as I heard an Orleans princess call them."

"Our 'poors' will rejoice in your liberality."

"And you and Rachel will not lapse into eccentricity, affect squalor, and walk about in patched boots, and ride in halfpenny omnibuses?"

"On fifteen thousand a year we can afford hansoms, and sound boots."

"Yes, as long as you remember that you are a man of the world as well as a Christian socialist."

Arden winced at the word Christian, averse to sailing under false colours; but he made no protest, remembering

Lorimer's idea of Christianity, which was to do right things in the right way.

"Talking of socialists, what became of your East End genius, Rachel's favourite, the man of whom you wrote in your letters to my wife?" asked Lorimer.

"I am sorry to say he came to a bad end."

"A very bad end, I guess, by your face."

"Yes, it was bad, and very bad. The man changed—and disappointed me."

"I see the subject is painful. I won't ask for details. Does Rachel know?"

"She knows nothing except that the man is dead. I would not trouble her mind with horrible fancies."

"Horrible fancies!"

Lorimer echoed the words wonderingly, startled by Arden's pallor, and the pained look in his contracted brow and troubled eyes. The words and the look puzzled him, distressed him even.

"You must tell me more about this business another day, Arden," he said. "I hate mysteries."

The other day never came, for in Lorimer's busy life impressions pass quickly, and all things going smoothly and happily in his daughter's courtship and marriage, the lover and husband's devotion being above suspicion, he forgot that momentary doubt, the flash of fear that had been evoked by the strangeness of Arden's manner and speech on one particular occasion.

Common sense ruled the house in Guelph Place; there was no touch of that eccentricity which Lorimer and his wife had apprehended. Mr. and Mrs. Arden spent about a fifth of their income upon themselves. Three thousand a year will go a long way in a family of two, where neither husband nor wife requires the stimulus of high play or extravagant clothes to give a zest to existence. Rachel's personal expenditure was trifling, but she liked to keep her sitting-rooms supplied with flowers, and those flowers of the freshest, and for this purpose two of her East End girls came to the house on alternate days bringing their baskets from Covent Garden, with the sweetest that the market could supply, bought advantageously in the early morning,

not the rare products of tropical hot-houses, but flowers that had bloomed in dewy gardens under sunny skies, flowers fresh from the mother-earth that bore them.

There could scarcely have been a happier life than Rachel's since the passing cloud of sorrow, the one sad memory, the joy that was and is not, the sorrow common to all lives. For her there was so little leisure to brood upon that one sorrow. All her days were occupied, all her thoughts were busy in the labour to which she had devoted her life, the steady unintermittent work for others that had been going on since her fifteenth birthday, when she cast in her lot with Mrs. Bellingham, and became a sister of charity without the nun's habit. There could scarcely have been a happier home than the small house whose hours were measured by the big clock on the front of St. James's Palace; and those who knew Mr. and Mrs. Walter Arden intimately always cited them as a splendid example of harmony of mind and heart in married life.

"They certainly contrive to make the best of both worlds," said a young matron, whose married life was a notorious failure. "With Mrs. Arden's perfect health it is easy to go in for philanthropy. If I had her constitution, I could defy germs, and wouldn't mind doin' a little slummin' now and then. It's rather interestin'; and philanthropy always pays, don't you know."

"Oh, pays, does it? That's a new idea!"

"You see it gets a woman talked about; and that's not easy nowadays, when all the women in society are clever and most of them pretty. No doubt Mrs. Arden would have always ranked among the pretty people; but she's too much of a prude to go far in that direction. But as the lovely young philanthropist she has made herself a place in society. Joey Bagstock is deep, sir, deep!" concluded the lady, with a false laugh.

If there were women whose egotism and vanity took offence at Rachel's popularity, there were others, and some among the most exalted, who admired and loved her. Philanthropy has its social circle among the many circles in the whirlpool of society; and the Ardens had their particular set of friends and fellow-workers, who were all busied in the same ceaseless endeavour for the betterment

of mankind. To the frivolous and sceptical, all their work was so much filling of bottomless pails, so much upward-rolling of stones that always rolled back again; but to the workers, in spite of failures and disappointments, there was the conviction of progress, the assurance that out of the many helped and comforted some at least had been better for that help and comfort, some death-beds had been smoothed, some young lives had been brightened, the conditions of life improved for many, and the battle valiantly fought against the three-headed monster, dirt, disease, and death.

In the world of philanthropy there was one man who rose above the ruck, pre-eminent, less for the largeness of his money gifts, though these were on a splendid scale as measured by his means, than by the fire of enthusiasm that informed every act of his life, and by a depth of religious fervour rare in this modern age of materialism and self-indulgence, an age in which the scoffer gives the tone to conversation, and homely, well-meaning men are ashamed to declare themselves followers of Christ, when schoolgirls with flowing hair and short petticoats pronounce themselves Darwinians, and ask if any one can really believe the old-fashioned creeds that sustained their grandmothers, when the churches are full of women, and only the eloquence of some famous preacher here and there has power to attract a congregation of men.

Lord St. Just was a churchman of the school of Laud, with so strong a leaning to all that was grand and beautiful in the faith of ancient days that it was a wonder to some of his friends that he had not taken the final step and surrendered his will and his intellect to the Passive Obedience of the Roman Church.

He had stopped in that *via media* where Newman intended to stop, and deeply as he admired Newman and Manning, he had never felt the necessity that compelled them to leave the church of their fathers.

He came of one of the oldest families in Cornwall, where there had been St. Justs since the Conquest, and though there were houses that boasted a Saxon descent and a more remote association with the soil, few could show a lineage as unbroken, or a family record so free from stain or blemish of any kind. Always conspicuous in the field of battle,

and devoted servants of the Sovereign, the St. Justs had been Tories and High Churchmen through every change in popular feeling, liberal landlords, bigoted politicians, hating a Whig and a Methodist, opposing Reform, and Catholic Emancipation, and the Repeal of the Corn Laws, but submitting to the inevitable with a good grace. More than one St. Just had made his mark in politics, and when Ambrose, the thirteenth Baron, took a double-first at Oxford, it was supposed that he, too, would make a figure in the public arena and maintain, or even enhance, the prestige of the family. His mother, who adored him, was moved when her friends told her of the career open to her son.

He was an only son, an only child, and his mother, still remarkable among matrons for her beauty, had scarcely a thought or a hope that did not centre in this one existence. She had lived only for her son, since her husband's untimely death in the Ashantee War, where he had gone as a volunteer, exchanging from the household brigade to a line regiment in order to serve under Wolseley. Even before her widowhood, when the delicate boy was still in the nursery, her son had been paramount.

"My dear Ethel, you know you can spare me," her husband said, when he pleaded for leave to join the expedition. "You will be so taken up with Ambrose's health that you will hardly know I am gone till you see me home again, with a scratch or two by way of distinction."

Lord St. Just distinguished himself in the brief war, and though seriously wounded, did not die of his wounds. Fever and climate gave him the *coup de grace* while he was waiting for the transport that was to take him home. His widow mourned him long, and never even entertained the idea of a second marriage, though she was only six and twenty at the time of his death. She kept all admirers at a distance, lived in the old Cornish manor house between sea and moorland, and devoted herself to her son. While he was in the nursery, and schoolroom, learning his rudiments with the village curate, she hardly left Cornwall; but when he went to Eton she took a furnished house at Maidenhead, in order to be near him, which she exchanged for a house at Woodstock when he went to Oxford. She was careful not to place any restraint upon his boyish independence in those happy Eton

days. It was enough for her to be near him, to know that the river at the end of her lawn was the river on which he took his pleasure, that she might see his boat flash by and his hat waved to her at any moment, that he could run in to breakfast or luncheon when the whim seized him—that he was near. To hear the college clock strike, to drive by the cricket-field and see the lads' white flannels flash in the sunshine was bliss. To know that he was near her, and happy! What more could the maternal heart desire?

At Woodstock life was even happier than at Maidenhead, for the undergraduate had more freedom than the Eton boy. St. Just was able to take his friends to his mother's house, and she made little dinners for him, and got together the nicest girls she could find in the neighbourhood, and her house was a centre of attraction for the best set at Christchurch. And so her son grew to manhood, and his mother to middle age, and the lives of both had been cloudless, till there came the discussion of army or no army for Lord St. Just.

All his relations, except the widowed mother, were of opinion that he ought to be in the Guards. It was a family tradition. Every St. Just had to be a soldier. Blues, Life Guards, Grenadiers, Coldstreams, Scots Guards; no matter which regiment was chosen, there would have been a St. Just in it at some time or other; but the Life Guards for this young St. Just by all means. But this particular St. Just happened, in spite of family tradition, to have the bent of the student rather than the soldier. He had pluck enough to head a forlorn hope or ride a Balaclava charge, had shown of what good stuff he was made in more than one life-saving adventure on the river, but he had no passionate desire for soldiering. He had been among the reading men in his first and second year at Christchurch, but in his third year his mind had taken a new development.

Wider horizons had opened before him, and he had become the leading spirit in a little band of philanthropists, as earnest in their devotion to humanity as John Wesley and his companions at the same college in the early days of Methodism. Like that admirable man, young Lord St. Just was not exempt from the ridicule which usually attaches to any fervid endeavour to make crooked things straight; the normal idea being to leave them crooked, and not to bother one's self or

anybody else; in short, never to "enthuse" about anything. But St. Just cared no more for ridicule than Wesley did; and he gave himself up, heart and brain and flesh and strength, to the work which it seemed to him good to do; and from the day he left Oxford his business in life was to help the suffering, and to raise the fallen. On all great questions affecting the good of the human race his voice was to be heard in the House of Lords. He had never willingly missed a debate in which the interests of humanity were at stake; and he made his mark early in his career as one of the most eloquent speakers in the Upper House. It may have been because he never spoke except when his heart moved him, and his mind was full.

St. Just was now in his thirtieth year, and there had been as yet no question of his marriage. He lived with his mother in the old family mansion in Portland Place, which had belonged to the St. Justs ever since it was built, a house large enough for entertaining on a grand scale, or for all the purposes of philanthropy.

There had been no brilliant gatherings, no dances or big dinners in the young lord's reign. The spacious dining-room had been devoted wholly to business purposes, committee meetings, and the rest, while a smaller room at the back of the house sufficed for hospitality, cosy dinners of eight or ten, luncheons at which artists and literary men were the salt that gave savour to the society of clerics and philanthropists. Lady St. Just entered with enthusiasm into all her son's schemes, believed as he believed, helped his work wherever a woman's help was wanted; and her lot would have been cloudless happiness but for one brooding fear in the background of her mind, a fear for the health and life of her son, the dread of hereditary consumption. It was on her own side of the house that the shadow had fallen. Her father and two of his sisters had succumbed to lung disease; two in the prime of life, one in the fair dawn of womanhood, lovely and beloved. At the time of her marriage, Ethel Challoner had been too young, and perhaps too thoughtless, to consider this family history a bar to wedlock, nor did any of her friends apprehend danger. She was a splendid specimen of girlhood, handsome, agile, full of life and energy, a star at lawn tennis,

a fine horsewoman, seemingly everything that a man should desire in the mother of a stalwart race. People thought St. Just had made an admirable choice. Certainly there had been consumption in the family, but that could have been only an accident. There was nothing consumptive-looking about Lady St. Just's father, General Challoner, before his fatal illness. Some men are imprudent, come home from shooting in wet clothes, and sit about in the tea-room or the smoking-room instead of going straight to a hot bath; and the finer the man the more reckless of health, and the likelier victim to lung trouble.

It was only as the years went on and a certain chest weakness showed itself in her son that Ethel St. Just began to brood upon the family history, and to think that, with that taint in her blood, she had sinned in becoming a wife and mother.

Lady St. Just had never heard of the modern theory which denies the inevitableness of lung disease, and will only admit heredity in the transmitted type of abnormal sensitiveness, with organs adapted to receive the fatal infection. She kept her fears in the dark caverns of her mind, shrinking from them as from hidden monsters; and she had never ventured to discuss the subject with any of her scientific acquaintance, the men of experience and research who might have given her comfort.

It was natural that friendship should grow and ripen between people engaged in the same work and thinking the same thoughts. Modest and silent as Rachel's mission had been, Lord St. Just heard of the good she had done, and of her devotion to the cause which, to his mind, was the first principle of the Christian life, without which creeds were meaningless formulæ and many prayers profitless as the winds blowing through desert places. He had heard of Miss Lorimer's beautiful life; but as her work was local, and as she never harangued on platforms, or mixed herself with public movements, it was not till the third year after her marriage that he made her acquaintance, meeting her at an evening party in the house of a world-renowned painter.

"Father Romney has told me of your life work, Mrs.

Arden," St. Just said, after their conversation had passed the preliminary stage of the year's pictures, and the last book.

"You know Father Romney?"

"He is my friend of many years, though we don't often meet. You see his work keeps him in the East."

"And your work is everywhere. Mrs. Bellingham has told me about you."

"That admirable woman! I do not see her half as often as I should like."

"She is my dearest woman friend, after my mother; and she is a kind of family connexion of my husband's."

"Will you ask me to one of your evenings, Mrs. Arden; so that I may meet my old friend? I have heard of your evenings."

"Oh, they are such insignificant little parties. Our drawing-rooms won't hold more than twenty people, and even then the rooms seem crowded—but all manner of good and clever people are kind enough to come, and I know Walter will be pleased to see you among them. We are at home every Thursday from ten to twelve."

He noticed that she said, "We are at home," where almost any other woman would have said, "I am at home." The plural pronoun had a pleasant bourgeois sound, indicating a Darby and Joan marriage, man and wife moving in the same groove, finding their delight in the same things.

Mrs. Walter Arden's Thursday evenings were popular among some of the choicest people in London, the workers with pen and pencil, men and women who had made their name in the world, politicians, well-known clerics, and here and there a fashionable butterfly, with brains enough to care for the things that do not belong to fashion.

Mr. Chudbrook Martyn, an Englishman with an Italian mother, polished, versatile, a poet and a painter, hovering between the worlds of art and of fashion, but an earnest worker all the same, was often to be found in the Arden drawing-rooms; Lady Hortensia Lambert, a woman of mind and wit, who loved art and letters better than the mode of the moment, the last society craze or the last society scandal, was also a frequent guest. Mr. Burton, the popular preacher of South Belgravia, the man who made

people think about their sins, if he could not make them leave off sinning, was another *habitué*. The small rooms were on fire with intellect, a focus of ardent thought, at other parties to be found only in a state of diffusion, an ounce of brains in a gallon of rose-water.

Lord St. Just found an atmosphere in which he seemed to breathe the breath of life as he had never done before. He had the feeling of a man who has climbed a hill, and pauses near the summit to taste the freshness of the keen upper air. He felt strengthened, rejuvenated by his intercourse with Rachel and her friends. Never before had he met a woman whose beauty had so touched his imagination, whose character had so impressed him by its saintliness.

He knew many saintly women, toilers in the vineyard of the Lord, women who gave all their time and work and most of their means to the cause of humanity.

But, alas, few among these saintly ones possessed the charm of an attractive personality. Some of them were elderly, and the world had left them before they left the world. To meet a woman of remarkable beauty, in the bloom of youth, who had devoted herself with a joyous heart to a task that repels all self-loving women, was a wonder that impressed him deeply. He studied Rachel's character, reflected upon her life and the circumstances of her up-bringing, until her image occupied the first place in his thoughts.

Then he awoke to a consciousness of his peril, one winter evening, sitting in a favourite church, on one side of the nave, while Rachel sat among the women on the other side. He awoke in a flash kindled by some words of the preacher—and knew that he had been giving too much of his mind and heart to a woman who could never enter into his life more nearly than she had entered already, as a friend and fellow-worker, the faithful and devoted wife of the husband she had chosen for herself.

Mrs. Bellingham had told him the history of that marriage, early in his acquaintance with Rachel. She had told him of that bitter day when the lovers parted, avowedly for ever, and when Walter Arden turned his face towards the Arctic Ocean in search of forgetfulness. She told him why he had been rejected, and how, after years of parting, and

when he seemed on the point of death, Rachel had taken compassion upon him, and had given him her heart.

"She is so intensely in earnest that I wonder she could trust her life to an unbeliever," St. Just said gravely.

"One always hopes for the best when the unbeliever is a good man," replied Mrs. Bellingham. "I have a great regard for Walter Arden, and I was very sorry she refused him in the first instance; yet her refusal was the cause of his winning a fortune which he uses nobly."

St. Just set a watch upon himself after that sudden revelation in the church. His joy in life must no longer be counted by the hours he spent in Mrs. Arden's company. There need be no break, no lessening of friendship. It was in himself that the battle must be fought, and the hosts of Midian discomfited. They come, they come, in such strange forms, in a guise so unlikely to alarm. In dear society, in sweet friendship, in the radiance of an almost celestial beauty, which seems to exalt and ennoble the heart it moves, in the purest joys, the loftiest hopes, the enemies of man may be at work; and the victim of their subtle spells may awaken from his fond dream to discover hell where he thought he had found heaven.

St. Just appeared in Mrs. Arden's drawing-room less frequently, and tried to arrive at a more intimate acquaintance with her husband. They were both members of the Carlton and the Travellers, and met frequently. They were men of the same views and aspirations in the cause of humanity, both engaged in the same kind of work, and interested in the same things.

But on the spiritual side of life a great gulf yawned between the man whose hopes were fixed on the higher life, and the man who saw nothing but darkness and the grave.

St. Just was an enthusiast in religion. He belonged to that Oxford set which in the waning century had rekindled the torch of Newman and the Tractarians with a fiercer flame; men for whom the *via media* was no impossibility, but whose middle path closely skirted the great Roman road which leads straight to the Vatican; men for whom the beauty of holiness meant all that is exalted and far-reaching in a creed, all that is splendid, pompous, decorative in a church.

The Conflict.

To the mind of St. Just the unbeliever, the man without God in the world, was a mystery. He could understand and pity the wretches given over to invincible ignorance—the heathens of London, on whom the light had never shone; but it was to him incomprehensible that a man of cultivated mind, mated with such a woman as Rachel, could shut his heart against the consolations of the Christian faith, and wilfully reject the one Divine hope which makes man's brief life on earth worth living.

As he became more intimate with Walter Arden, meeting him very often in hours of leisure, at their club, or in their philanthropic work, east or west, he discovered that Rachel's husband was the prey of some hidden care; and it was a wonder to him that such a man, so placed in life, so blessed by the love of an adorable woman, could be otherwise than utterly happy. He could think of but one solution to that problem. The man without God in the world could not know happiness. There was the something wanting, the promise of light behind the veil, without which all was dust and ashes.

One night, after they had been friends for more than a year, and had worked much together and become really intimate, St. Just ventured to touch upon Arden's gloomy mood. There had been a public meeting of some importance at Bethnal Green, and Arden had been present with his wife and St. Just. Rachel and Mrs. Bellingham had driven home together, and the two men had preferred the long walk westward, through streets which were for the most part silent. It was an exquisite summer night, and the great human hive seemed to lie hushed and tranquil under the stars.

"I don't like to see you subject to these fits of depression," St. Just said, after they had walked some distance without a word spoken by Arden, who had evidently not heard his companion's occasional remarks on the places through which they passed. "I have suffered from the same kind of thing myself. My doctor tells me it is only a question of health, what he calls being run down. I'm afraid you have been run down for some time past."

"No, no, it is not a question of health. I let other people think so; I tell my wife that it is so, rather than that she should suspect the miserable truth. I am not a happy man, St. Just. All things that make for peace on

earth have been given to me; all things that make life dear; a wife I adore, the means of making the common lot better, of gratifying every good impulse, the knowledge that I am of some use in the world; all good things have been given me, and I have not found content."

To the deeply religious man the answer was clear.

"I think that is because you do not look for happiness in the right way, or in the right place," St. Just answered gently; and then he quoted an old-fashioned poet whom former generations revered—

"'He builds too low who builds below the stars.'"

"Ah, but I cannot build above the stars. My imagination will not carry beyond the things I see. The earth I know is Huxley's earth; the heaven I know is the astronomer's heaven. If there be anything in the infinite distance beyond Neptune—anything other than suns and systems, uninhabitable stars, immeasurable distances—anything in which we poor worms are interested, I cannot imagine it, or believe in it," he added gloomily.

"And therefore you are unhappy."

"No, not therefore. I was happy enough, reading my Darwin and my Spencer, six years ago. I was a creature without a care. St. Just, you are a good man; I know I can trust you with secrets I have told to none."

"Yes, you can trust me, as other men have trusted me, men whose secrets were hanging matters. But don't tell me anything unless you believe I can help you."

"You will sympathize with me, perhaps, if you can understand the unimaginable. I have but one friend to whom I ever open my mind, and he is on the other side of the world. I have written to him freely about myself, and he has sympathized and understood. But even to him I have not told what I am going to tell you."

"Make me your father confessor, if you like. You may trust me as if I were a priest."

"Six years ago it was my misfortune to come between a profligate and his prey. I could not save the girl; but I killed her destroyer."

"Murder!" said St. Just, in a horrified whisper.

"No; a duel—a fair fight, with seconds, everything *en*

règle. He was physically my superior, and a fine swordsman. Happily for me—or, perhaps, unhappily—I was nearly as good, and fortune favoured me. In an onslaught which was more like the attack of a man-eating tiger than of a human being, he got the worst of it. He died cursing me; and he swore that I should never know peace, that in some form or other, or formless, he would pursue me; that when I was happiest, amidst the smiles of fortune, in the companionship of the woman I loved, his spirit should blast me."

"A wicked man's idle threat."

"Idle, yes! so I thought. But those words were spoken six years ago; and from that hour to this, except in certain blessed intervals, I have been a haunted man."

"And you killed him fairly? As a man of the world, you have nothing to reproach yourself with as to the manner of his death?"

"Nothing. Nor do I regret the fatal issue; since I freed the world of a wretch who lived only to do evil."

"And your imagination has been haunted by the dying man's curse. I can understand your feelings. To me the idea of a duel is horrible. The idea of a man, a sinner, taking upon himself to destroy his fellow-man, of set purpose, face to face, and eye to eye, is to my mind more terrible than unpremeditated murder, when the savage that lives in civilized man gets the upper hand."

"Yes, I know it is horrible, where the men who stand face to face are of the same nature; but this man was a monster of iniquity, and I felt myself a destined avenger. I told myself that if I killed him it would be an execution, and not a murder. No, St. Just; dreadful as it may seem to you, I have never repented of that act."

And then, in agitated phrases, pouring out his darkest thoughts, he told his friend of that haunting presence which made life a burden—the unseen, the ubiquitous, the thing which had neither shape nor name, neither sound nor substance, but which was always with him, in all his thoughts by day, in all his dreams by night.

He told of the scenes on the Klondyke, and the inexplicable change in the man he had trusted and almost loved, the rough, strong nature that his friendship had softened and refined, the radical artisan in whom he had

acknowledged his superior in force of mind and will. He described those awful moments on the river, when, startled from his sleep, he saw a murderer's eyes glaring down at him, and knew that the soul looking out of those terrific eyes was not the soul of Michael Dartnell.

St. Just heard this strange story with pity and horror.

"Alas! my poor friend," he said, "superstition has always been one of the penalties of unbelief in God. Your imagination cannot conceive the mysteries revealed in the Gospel. The Incarnation, the Divinity of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead, are to you unthinkable; and yet you are haunted by the idea that the wicked soul of the man you killed could live again in the form of your friend."

"Is the idea so strange? Is this doctrine of metempsychosis, which has been common to the savage and to the philosopher in innumerable ages, so incredible to you, the Christian—you who believe that the soul still lives, invisible, untraceable, impalpable to human sense, while the form it once governed lies in the dust, and goes on living, where and how you know not? Granted the afterlife, is it incredible that the souls of the just and the unjust should exist as wandering spirits, and assume new tabernacles of clay? Where are the deathless souls of the wicked, do you think? Do you imagine them as Dante saw them in his dream—each in his allotted sphere, suffering torments commensurate to his guilt? Is it not more credible that the evil spirit should cling to the scenes of its lawless pleasures, thirsting for revenge upon unforgiven foes, longing to resume the carnal life it loves, the life of sensual indulgence and unbridled sin? This conviction has shaped itself in my mind with irresistible force: and as truly as I believe in my own existence at this moment, I believe that Michael Dartnell, the Michael I knew, left this earth, and that the hellish spirit of my enemy entered into his lifeless clay. To you it may seem the idea of a madman; but I know I am not mad."

"You are sane now. But who can answer for your sanity if you brood upon this wild imagination? The conception is like the beginning of madness—an *idée fixe* of the worst kind. My dear Arden, there is no help for you, except in Christ. If you cannot carry your troubles, your perplexities,

your despair, to the Friend and Comforter of man, you reject the only means of cure that I can imagine, in such a case as yours. Your wife's affection, your consciousness of a life well spent in the cause of humanity, these have failed to bring you peace. There is but one resource, one refuge."

"That refuge is only open to the believer. For me the gates are closed, and they are gates of adamant. Flesh cannot prevail against them."

"But spirit can. The light will break through the darkness by-and-by, perhaps. Go on with your good work, and try to forget this horrible hallucination."

"I have sought forgetfulness in strenuous work; I have striven to give every thought of my brain to others, to lose my own identity in the sufferings of others; but the paramount thought is there still. I may lose consciousness of myself, but I cannot lose consciousness of my inexorable enemy. Wherever I go, *he* goes with me. He comes between me and the wife I love. He comes between me and suffering mankind."

"My dear friend, I am deeply sorry for you; but my sorrow is worth nothing. God alone can help you," St. Just answered earnestly.

"Your sympathy is worth much. It has been a relief to talk to you. A lunatic notion, isn't it?" added Arden, laughing excitedly, with a sudden change of tone. "And, after all, perhaps only a horrible hallucination, as you call it—a question of nerves."

"I believe it is a question of mind rather than nerves—a mind in peril of shipwreck for want of the Divine Helper of men. To be without God in the world! Oh, my dear Arden, you, and men like you, who so lightly renounce the privileges of the Christian life, who think it enough to say, 'I cannot believe in miracles, and I can steer my own course without any guiding star,' those men must be prepared for the worst that can happen to man. The empty house is there, swept and garnished, ready for visitants from hell, wild delusions, phantasmal horrors, the diabolical inventions of a mind that has lost its grasp on reality."

"In plain words, you take me for a madman?"

"No, no; not that,—but I take you for a man whose reason is in danger, whose conscience is more sensitive than he thinks, and who is in supreme need of the Divine Healer. Arden, believe me, on my honour, you have my heartfelt sympathy. I want to be your friend. I am your friend. I would do anything—anything that a man could do for his best-loved brother, to bring you peace of mind and happiness."

"You cannot do that; but I am grateful for your sympathy, and I ought not to feel angry if you think I am mad. Indeed, I sometimes think I am myself."

"Will you hear my view of your position without being offended, and let me help you? I believe I could help you, if you would let me."

"I will hear your words as the speech of a friend, and nothing you can say shall offend me."

"I think you are at heart a Christian, and that the idea of having killed a fellow-creature in cold blood is as repugnant to you as it would be to me. I believe that since that act, however you may excuse it to yourself by the consideration that he fell in a fair fight, your mind has been weighed down by the sense of sin. I believe that the haunting presence that has made your life a burden has been the agony of remorse in a mind too fine to bear the stain of blood, the ever-present consciousness of a sin unatoned. I believe that for this suffering of yours there is only one possible cure, the reconciliation of the soul with God; and that until by some Divine interposition, by some spiritual process whose mode and manner I cannot foresee, faith has drawn your wandering steps to the foot of the Cross, and rent the veil that hides the Redeemer's face, and has shown you where to seek and where to find forgiveness of sin, and peace on earth, and hope in heaven —until then, my poor friend, remorse for an act which was at variance with your own life and character will pursue you with those mental horrors which you take for a diabolical influence."

They had passed from the east to the west, and had arrived at Oxford Circus.

"I thank you with all my heart for being in earnest with me!" Arden said, as they clasped hands, and parted.

XVII.

Walter Arden's confession made a turning-point in St. Just's life. His course of action changed from that hour. He had resolved to restrict his friendship with Rachel; he had foreseen peril to his soul in his growing regard for her; but after Arden's revelation, he told himself that his first duty in life was to safeguard the woman who had given him her friendship, and who might be in bitter need of a friend. He had no doubt in his own mind that Arden was a monomaniac, unsuspected by the wife who loved him, or by the society in which he lived. Such a delusion as that under which he suffered could only have been engendered in a mind on the verge of madness; and there could be no doubt that this man, who had Rachel's happiness and life in his power, was an incipient lunatic, capable at the present time of conducting the business of his life like a reasonable being, but liable at any hour to develop a dangerous form of lunacy.

The man who loved Rachel, who had withdrawn himself from a friendship that was becoming too close and too dear, now resolved to continue that friendship at any risk of his own unhappiness. He had no fear of peril for her. He had seen her single-minded devotion to her husband. He knew the purity of a nature in which affection reigned supreme, free from the passions that lead to the tragedy of life. He had no fear that she would ever hold him too dear; though she might come to lean upon him for help and counsel, and to turn to him in any time of difficulty. It was for him to watch for the coming of evil. It might be that Arden's hallucination was only a passing phase of a brain weakened by periods of fever in the past, and that the cloud might lift.

In his fervent prayers for Rachel's peace, he prayed in singleness of heart for her husband's cure. The blessings he asked for her were those which her own heart desired. He gave himself to her service, as her guardian and protector, without one selfish thought. His religious fervour had lifted him above the things that make the bliss or woe of worldlings. He could go on loving without one guilty hope. He could devote his life to the beloved, and ask no higher recompense than the knowledge that he had shielded her from dangers of which she knew not. To work for her without reward and without praise was all he asked from Fate.

He associated himself now more nearly with the little company of workers within the sound of Bow-bells, whose Bishop and leader was Father Romney. He interested himself in all Mrs. Bellingham's schemes, and in all Rachel's favourite pensioners—her old men, and women, and children, her factory girls, and working lads, her day-nurseries for infants, and night-schools for adults. There were few days on which the friends did not meet; and there were quiet evenings in every week which St. Just spent in Rachel's drawing-room, with husband and wife.

He had watched Arden during more than a year of close friendship, and had seen no sign of the thing which he feared. Whatever delusions the man suffered in the realms of thought, he was able to conduct the business of life with good sense and discretion. But from the home of the wedded lovers, from the home that had once been so happy, the spirit of gladness had fled. The gaiety of heart, the pleasure in trifles, the interest in all the details of domestic life, which make the felicity of home, were wanting in the dainty little house in Guelph Place. Rachel struggled long against the thought that her husband was no longer happy; the change had been so gradual, so vague, that she had hardly realized it. There was only the sense of something wanting, a light gone out, shadow where there had been sunshine. She took to watching her husband's face, waiting for the smile that was now so rare. She questioned him often and anxiously about his health, fearing some subtle disease, that might cloud over his life; but he laughed off her fears, and even consented to go with

her to a famous physician, in order that she might be reassured.

In a few minutes of confidential talk, after he had seen his patient, the doctor told her that she had no cause for anxiety. Her husband had a splendid constitution, unimpaired by his sufferings at Klondyke, and the subsequent breakdown. As for the depression, which had made her anxious, that was a matter of temperament.

"Some men have not the *joie de vivre*, and are rather difficult subjects in consequence," concluded the doctor. "Mr. Arden wants rousing—mental occupation. You should make him go into Parliament."

"I would do anything," said Rachel, with tears in her eyes; and that ended the interview, which took place while her husband was putting on his overcoat and waiting for his carriage.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Rachel," he said, as they drove away from Harley Street.

"Relieved, but not satisfied, Walter, while I see you unhappy."

"My dearest, I am not unhappy. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I could be unhappy, with the sweetest wife in the world."

She tried to persuade herself that all was well. Her husband was no less devoted than in the cloudless beginning of their union. He sought no pleasures out of his own house. His clubs knew him no more; but too many hours of his home life were spent in the solitude of his library, a large room built out at the back of the small house, covering the oblong space sacred to sparrows, that had once called itself a garden. He sat here alone day after day, seemingly absorbed in study, and no longer working with his secretary at the business of philanthropy. The secretary now came to Rachel for instructions; and it was she who wrote or dictated the answers to the daily letters. Most of the business of charity now devolved upon her; and she gradually came to lean upon St. Just for advice and help in all cases where her husband had been her ally and helper. And thus the bond of friendship grew closer and stronger, until she wondered what her life had been like before this earnest and deeply religious thinker had been her daily

companion, sharing all her thoughts of the better life, looking as she looked beyond the grave for the answer to all that is darkest and most inexplicable upon earth. A perfect sympathy reigned between them.

It was during this period that St. Just suffered the first great sorrow of his life, in the almost sudden death of his mother, which happened after an illness of less than a week. She was gone, the companion and friend, and the house in Portland Place, which had been so pleasant a home, became hateful to him. He used it henceforward only as an office, a place in which to receive his fellow-workers, or to give dinners or evening entertainments to the young men of his University Mission. The spacious old rooms served for philanthropic purposes; but he could live under that roof no more. He took rooms in Berkeley Street, and was so much nearer to Guelph Place and the friends to whom he looked for consolation in his bereavement. His mother had seen much of Rachel in the last two years, and had loved her, too unworldly to apprehend evil from the close friendship between St. Just and Walter Arden's wife. Her son was to her as a saint on earth, secure from the snares of human passion, living only to do good works, and think high thoughts.

It needed the voice of a worldling to suggest danger in a friendship which St. Just knew to be pure and free from guile. Lady Mary Selby's was the voice, uplifted in all candour and kindliness, but still the voice of the world, which sees only the surface of things, and measures every life and every character by the same conventional standard; the rule of the things that are done and the things that are not done.

Lady Mary and St. Just had met often in Guelph Place, and occasionally in the great world, and they were on very friendly terms; so he was not surprised when she drew him aside at an evening party in one of the great houses of London, the house of a leader in the political world.

"I have been dying for a quarter of an hour's quiet talk. Shall we go into the winter garden?" she asked. "There are very few people there now; every one is drifting to the supper-room."

"By all means, if you will let me take you to supper afterwards."

"Of course I will. Do you suppose I mean to go home unfed? The Lincolnshire House suppers are feasts of many inventions. It is a liberal education in gastronomy to feed here."

They went into the spacious conservatory, where the rose-scented atmosphere was cooler than the rooms, and where only a few couples sat secluded in shadowy corners, breathing odours of orange-blossom, which might be either a forecast or a mockery, as those low murmurings of neighbouring lips meant the making or the breaking of marriage vows.

St. Just and Lady Mary found a solitary sofa out of earshot.

"I want to talk to you about my sister-in-law," Lady Mary said, with her unflinching air.

"I shall be charmed to hear you on so admirable a subject. Mrs. Arden is my ideal of all that is best in a woman."

"I know that. But perhaps you don't know that you are dragging your ideal into the mud."

"Lady Mary!"

"Oh, of course you are astonished. You had no idea what was happening, any more than Rachel, who is a baby in the ways of the world. You thought you could be at her house day after day; that you could go about the East End with her; drive from west to east and east to west *tête-à-tête* in her brougham; haunt all the houses she visits, and rarely appear when she is not expected. You thought—you, who have your clubs and your men-friends, and who ought to know something of the world you live in—you absolutely thought that you could carry on in this way and not set people talking."

"The people who can imagine evil of my friendship for Mrs. Arden would scent corruption in a garden of roses, see stains on the new-fallen snow upon the mountains, remote and pure under the eye of God. We need not give such people a thought."

"Oh, but you need; you must think of them. I am not a mischief-maker, or a scandal-bearer, Lord St. Just. I

have lived too long in society to be keen about scandals; I have heard too many of them. They are all pretty much alike, and they soon pall on a woman with a ha'porth of brains. But I must stand up for my brother. He has had troubles—mental troubles—which have marred his life; and of late he has chosen to keep aloof from Rachel, whom he idolizes. I don't want him to know what I am telling you—I don't want to make bad blood between you and him. I know you are a man of honour, of high principle even, of religious convictions such as few men hold. You are not a man to persist in conduct which reflection must show you to be wrong."

"I have never harboured one thought which you and all the world might not know—in relation to your sister-in-law."

"I can believe that. I believe that you are a good man, capable even of that rare sentiment, friendship for a young and beautiful woman. But you have been forgetting that the world won't allow a woman to have a friend, not even if she is middle-aged and ugly; much less if she is as attractive as my brother's wife. I have been hearing insinuations, little hints, seeing smiles and significant looks, for a long time. Oh, you don't know how malignant the women who have 'thrown their caps over the mill' can be about a woman whose virtues are a standing reproach to them. Rachel has never posed as a saint, but they all know that she is a saint, and they loathe the saintly character. She has taken a strong line as a philanthropist too. They sneer at her plain frocks, and call her the sham Quakeress. They hate and envy her for not being up to her eyes in debt to milliners and hairdressers, as they are. And so they jump at the first chance of throwing mud at her."

"It cannot affect her. She is as remote from the sphere of such women as if she were among the stars."

"You are mistaken, Lord St. Just. There is only one sphere, bounded on the east by Carlton House Terrace, and on the west by Rutland Gate. The saints and the sinners are all moving in the same circle; and the sinners are trying their hardest to drag the saints down to their own level."

"You have noticed one malicious woman's sneer, Lady Mary. You have been hurt and made angry, and you

unconsciously exaggerate. I cannot believe that my friendship for your sister-in-law could provoke slander. I honour and revere her. I would make any sacrifice of my own happiness rather than that the breath of slander should sully her name."

"Her name is sullied already. You are talked of as the Kindred Spirits, the Saints, the Heavenly Lovers. I have heard enough to be sure of the mischief you are doing, though they daren't talk openly before me. My brother is asleep—hears nothing, sees nothing. It is my duty to speak plainly. I can't help it if you are angry."

"I am angry with the hatefulness of human nature, not with you. As if her life—her pure and perfect life—and my life, which has been spent for others ever since I learnt to think—as if that were not enough to save her from the evil-speaking of women whose only instinct is self-indulgence, who exist only for sensuous and sensual pleasures, and shut their eyes and ears against the sufferings of humanity."

"They are all that, and I detest them. But they are the world; and Rachel will have to live among them, and be judged by them, till she joins some Sisterhood and shuts herself behind a convent gate."

"And this world of yours will not let her have a friend?"

"It will not! It never did, and never will believe in friendship between man and woman. Why, if Rachel were elderly and blind, living in another country, and writing gossiping letters to you, as Madame du Deffand wrote to Horace Walpole, people would shrug their shoulders and say there was more in the correspondence than met the eye, and that only a careful selection of her letters were fit for publication. A man can't be a woman's friend without being her enemy."

"Well, I will not be Rachel's enemy," he said, drawing a deep breath, as if he were offering up the sacrifice of a life.

He had never called her Rachel before. Lady Mary noted the slip.

"I am sure you will do all that is honourable and kind," she said, rising and giving him her hand.

He had risen impetuously at the beginning of their conversation, and had remained standing.

"I will try to do what is best for her."

"I have unbounded faith in you, Lord St. Just. And now will you take me to the supper-room? These agitating discussions make one awfully hungry."

He smiled, with white lips, wondering if he would ever want to eat again, and loathing the crowd he would have to face in the struggle for champagne and quails; the trivial crowd that he hated; the crowd that scrambled for plovers' eggs and iced asparagus and '84 champagne, while thousands of fellow-creatures within a few miles of them were wasting away for lack of wholesome food.

Lady Mary noted his pallor, and was merciful. She seized upon the first "nice boy" who ran against them in the crush—a young guardsman, beardless and beautiful.

"Have you just come away from the supper-room, Dick?" she asked.

"This instant; but I'll go back with pleasure, if I may take you. The duke's Veuve Pommery is tipple for kings."

"Then I'll release you," she said to St. Just. "I know you are tired, and want to go home."

"I think you will be in better hands with Mr. Quindon," he said. "Good night."

"By Jupiter! St. Just looks bad," exclaimed the youth, when he was gone. "A man oughtn't to go to dances with such a death-bed face. He's as ghastly as the statue in *Don Giovanni*. He ought to stick to the philanthropic caper—Bethnal Green and Bermondsey, don't you know."

St. Just did not go straight home on leaving Lincolnshire House. His own rooms were within five minutes' walk, and he felt that he wanted the freedom of the empty streets and the deserted park under the starlit June sky. There would be no room inside four walls for the tempest of his thoughts. He had to think of *her;* of what was best for *her*—best, not happiest; for he could scarcely doubt that his friendship had been of value to her in the last year, a source of consolation in her sorrow at her husband's estrangement. He had filled the empty place in her life; he had been to her as a brother, and not one word had ever been breathed by her lips or by his that could offend

the husband to whom she had given herself in purity of heart. But there had been the intimacy of minds that think alike, of hearts moved by the same emotions of pity and love, the same religious fervour, the same self-surrender for the service of Christ.

She had talked to him even of her dead child, that sacred theme which she could not speak of without tears. She had told him of her hopes and visions of the future while that child was with her; how she had pictured his life—the Christian life, the life that was to be a light in the darkness of the helpless and unfortunate. She talked of her child in the after-life, and loved to dwell upon the blessedness of the saints with God, with an implicit faith in the unseen.

"I do wrong to grieve for my son, knowing that I shall go to him in the new life," she said.

They had been in such perfect sympathy, a friendship so exalted, so free from guile. And this pure affection, held in check on his part with such undeviating self-control, had not escaped malignant remark. And then, awakened by that revelation of the world's malevolence, there came the thought of possible peril, peril to two souls now white and stainless, but which one impassioned moment, one lapse of self-mastery, might taint with at least the suggestion of sin. So far, he had never transgressed, never passed the limits of a friendship such as obtained among the brothers and sisters of the Early Church, when Christians heard the near echo of the Master's voice, and thought and talked of their Lord as of One who was with them yesterday. But could he be sure of himself to the end? Could he see her day after day in a growing intimacy, upon which her own purity of heart placed no restrictions, and trust himself never to betray the secret of a sinful love, a love that was an offence against her purity, however he might control all outward signs of the fire that burnt within?

"The worldling's voice is the voice of wisdom," he thought, slowly pacing to and fro in the summer darkness. "I have been playing with fire. How could I ever forgive myself if I let her guess my secret—if I startled that exquisite innocence which fears no evil with the revelation of a passionate love? It has been a lovely dream; but it is

over. Neither her good name nor her peace of mind shall suffer by my wrong-doing."

For the three following days St. Just was absorbed in business details. He spent most of his time in Portland Place, where he had appointments with the men with whom he worked, his equals, or his subordinates, enthusiasts like himself, his friends and his disciples, and his paid helpers. He contrived to see them all, and to go into the particulars of every good work to which he had put his hand. He pledged his income to the uttermost in his contributions to the financial support of these home missions, which in the far-off golden age were to make the wilderness of pauper life in London blossom as the rose; and which had already reclaimed many pestilential swamps, and exterminated many poisonous weeds.

His friends were distressed at the idea of having to carry on their work without their leader.

"You are the moving spirit of everything, St. Just," said one of his Oxford chums; "the only one of us who won't see failure, and whose pluck has never failed when the whole business seemed a hopeless muddle. I suppose it's some blessed alarmist in Harley Street who is sending you away. The modern doctor's favourite fad is the idea that an Englishman can't live in England?"

"No; I haven't asked the doctors. I know that I am not in good health, without their opinion. I have bought a two-hundred-ton yacht. She is at Marseilles, where I shall join her next week, and start on a vagabond voyage."

"Shall you go far?"

"Who knows? I said a vagabond voyage. If I don't find the Mediterranean good enough, I shall slip through the Suez and steer my course to the South Seas."

"Poor fellow!" his friends said, as they left his house.

"Lungs, of course," said one. "I shall be at Charing Cross on Saturday night, for a farewell hand-shake. Who knows if we shall ever see him again?"

"I shouldn't like to bet even money on his return," said another. "He looks awfully ill."

"The old story of the sword and the scabbard. This one is a fiery sword in an ivory scabbard. Knowing the work he has done since he left Oxford, I wonder he is alive!"

XVIII.

RACHEL was surprised at not having seen St. Just during those three days, for within the last half-year a day had rarely passed without their meeting, either in some scene of her daily work, at Mrs. Bellingham's house, or in her own drawing-room. She missed him sadly before the third day of his absence came to an end. Since her husband's isolation, she had come to depend upon St. Just's judgment on all doubtful questions, most of all as to the manner in which the innumerable appeals to her benevolence should be answered. St. Just was a shrewd judge of human nature, and rarely failed in his diagnosis. The professional begging-letter writer had a poor chance with him; and he was a shrewd judge of the worthiness or unworthiness of the amateur who has but lately begun to depend upon a facile pen and a penny stamp for increased income.

Rachel was sitting in the lamplight after dinner, with a pile of unanswered letters before her, on the third evening of St. Just's absence, when the servant announced him.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, going to meet him with outstretched hand. "I have been wanting your advice about so many of these letters—such piteous letters—from impostors perhaps—but they make one's heart ache all the same."

"The more heart-rending the letter, the more need of verification. Indeed, Mrs. Arden, in your place I should be adamant to all letter-writers, and give all your help to those you know, face to face, in their own homes—whose characters, surroundings, necessities, you know at first hand. Even your resources have their limits. If you give all to those you know, you may forgive yourself for refusing those you don't know. Whatever their sphere, they too must

have their helpers. There are good Samaritans upon every road nowadays."

"I know you are right; but these letters torture one, all the same."

"Oh, there must always be that kind of torture for sensitive minds, while the differences of fortune are as they are. There is the torture of seeing an overworked horse in a cart, the thought of the inequality in the fortunes of horses—the underfed cab-horse in the pelting rain, crawling along the streets at midnight, and the sleek carriage-horses dozing in their warm stable. You will have to harden your heart, my dear Mrs. Arden, to make up your mind that even all you do is but as a drop of sweetness in a sea of bitter waters."

Rachel looked at him wonderingly. There was something in his tone that was new to her—an indefinable difference.

"What have you been doing in the last three days?" she asked. "You are looking pale and over-tired."

"I have been working very hard. I have been setting my house in order."

"But I thought your house was always in order. Every one says you are such a wonderful man of business."

"I have been setting my house in order before leaving England. The fact is, I find myself out of health; I want change of scene and atmosphere. It is a want all workers feel at some time in their lives; and I am going to give myself rest before I break down."

"That is very wise of you," she answered gravely; and the look of sorrow in her face sent a thrill through his overstrained nerves. "I shall miss you dreadfully in all our work—and—and in so many ways; but I am glad you are taking the first warning. Do you mean to be away long?"

"Till I am cured," he answered, with a faint, sad smile.

She would never know the malady which had need of cure, or how slow the healing process was likely to be.

"And are you going far?"

He told her how he had bought a friend's steam-yacht, a nearly new boat, by one of the best builders on the Clyde.

"Won't it be too hot in the Mediterranean in summer?"

"Oh, I can bask; I shall have rest, which I suppose will

be all I want. And in October or November I shall make for the South Seas."

"Like Stevenson?"

"Stevenson's book has inspired me with a longing for the islands he loved."

"Perhaps you will be like him, and settle there for life."

"No, no; I don't contemplate such a possibility. I should always be thinking of what could be done in fifty years of Europe. A man would need the genius and the imagination of a Stevenson to find happiness in that primitive life."

"But in any case you will be away for years—for many years, perhaps."

"No, no; I hope my cure will not be so slow. A year or two should be enough. Two years would be a long exile from friends—like you!"

Her voice had been faintly tremulous, but his was steady. He had nerved himself for this farewell interview as a man nerves himself for a surgical operation; and in this case there could be no anæsthetic, he must needs feel all the pain, and all the peril of self-betrayal.

"You say that you are out of health," Rachel said, after a pause. "I hope there is nothing serious the matter—nothing that need make your friends anxious about you."

"Oh no, there is nothing serious. I am not ordered away by the doctors. My going is a precautionary step."

"I am glad of that. I shall miss you sadly. You have been so kind, and I have come to rely on your help so much—since—since my husband has taken less interest in my work."

"His interest may be revived, if you tell him you have need of his help. You must try to win him back into the old paths."

"Oh, if I only could! He began by being so warmly interested, so helpful for all those poor people; but now he has ceased to care for them. I know he is unhappy, but I can find no reason for his trouble. He has a worried, haunted look, that grieves me more than I can say, and I can do nothing to brighten his life. I know nothing of the shadow that darkens it. Something—something I cannot understand—has come between us and made us almost

strangers; and, now you are going away, I shall feel utterly alone."

Her voice faltered in her struggle not to give way to tears. Her sorrow, her appeal to his friendship, shook St. Just's resolution.

"Rachel, Rachel, cannot you understand, cannot you read my heart—the heart that aches for love of you? It is my love that is parting us—my hopeless love, the love of years. It was easy to call love friendship. Love has been sweet under that name; and you know that I have never offended, never said one word that you ought not to hear, never for one moment forgotten that you are Walter Arden's wife."

"No, no, no. You have always been my friend, my trusted friend. Why do you spoil our friendship now? I have honoured and looked up to you."

"I did not mean to tell you. I meant to carry my secret to my grave, and that you should never know all you have been to me; the one love of my life, loved from the hour of our first meeting, worshipped with every throb of my heart from that hour to this. But the words have been said, and at least you know that I am not leaving you for a light reason, that I am not false to the dear friendship you have given me. It is for your dignity, for my honour, that I go. I have been told that our friendship has provoked comment, that if it continued your name would suffer; and your good name is dearer to me than my own happiness. And now I have put a barrier between us."

"Yes, you have put a lifelong barrier between us," she said, with a profound sigh. "I am very sorry. I was so happy in your friendship; and now you have made friendship impossible. All things that I care for seem to fall away from me. I won't say that I have lost my husband's love—but I know that he is changed to me. A cloud has come between us; there is a mystery in his life that I cannot fathom. I should be utterly lonely if it were not for those poor castaways who depend upon me, and who love me a little, I think."

"They love you much," St. Just cried passionately. "How can they help loving you? To them you represent all that is purest and best in human love, the Christ-like love

which forgives sin and believes in the regeneration of sinners. You enter their dark haunts like living sunlight; you lift them out of the slough of despond. Oh, be sure you have your guerdon of human love. Never believe the people who tell you the poor are ungrateful or unloving. Good-bye, Rachel. Forget this confession of mine, if you can. Think of me only as your friend, and as a man in whom honour is stronger than passion. Write to me when I am far away. I shall write to you sometimes, to tell you where my wanderings have brought me. Write and tell me of your own life, and all things that have to do with your happiness."

"Yes, I will write to you," she answered simply. "I shall forget every foolish word that you have spoken this night. I shall think of you when you are far away as I have known you in the last two years—my kind friend and counsellor. Good-bye."

She gave him her hand, looking at him with the clear and earnest gaze he knew so well. He had seen that look in her eyes when she had pleaded with some sinner whose fall she deplored—a look so mournful, yet so full of a divine compassion.

He bent his lips over the gentle hand, as he might have kissed the hand of a saint, and left her without a word.

"And now this world holds nothing for me but duty," he thought, as he left her. "The two women I loved are gone from me; one in death; one in lifelong severance. I have done with love for the individual, and must live for the species."

A strange grey life began for Rachel on the morning after St. Just's farewell. She felt as if all interest, all colour, had gone out of her life. She fought against her dejection, and went about her old work with untiring patience; but the mind within was dull and inert. She let her old women talk to her of their woes and grievances, and was kind and gentle with them; but it would have gone ill with her had she been called on to repeat their pitiful stories. It was a relief when one of them exclaimed—

"You ain't brought his lordship this arternoon. I do like to hear him talk the Gospel—he do make it all come out

clear and strong, like as if it was in the morning paper; while in most sermons as I hear the preacher seems to beat about the bush, so as I can't follow him. I can allus follow his lordship; and, to be sure, I ought to, when he was that kind and paid my rent for a year in advance, so as I shan't have to worrit myself all winter."

"He is very fond of you, Biddy. But you won't see him for a long time; he has gone on a sea-voyage for his health."

"Poor dear gentleman! He always looked a bit peaky —but so kind, and so generous. Then I suppose he'll be gone six months or so?"

"Longer than that, I think. But I shall take care of you, Biddy."

"And so you always have, mum. My life hasn't been the same since the day your pretty face came in at that door. Lor, I remember it as if it was yesterday. You was wearing a sweet hat, with forget-me-nots in it, and as it might be a bow of fine white lace. And I thinks here's another of them fine ladies come to mag about religion, and why don't I go to the week-day services, and the Wednesday and Friday evenings in Lent. But I soon found the difference. You didn't come to preach to me, but to try and make me a bit more comfortable."

"And when you were more comfortable you liked coming to the Lent sermons," said Rachel.

"Yes, mum. After a good cup of tea and a bloater, and with a bit of fire to come home to, I don't mind an evening service. They may sing a hanthem, and make the sermon as long as they like, when I'm feeling comfortable inside, and with a warm cape to my back such as you gave me. But I hope, now his lordship has gone away, Mr. Arden will come among us with you again, as he used to do when you and him was keeping company. He's as kind a gentleman as ever lived, and never one to worry folks about religion. I don't know as ever he mentioned the Gospel in my hearing."

"He will come back to his old friends by-and-by, I hope, Biddy. He has been depressed and out of spirits of late."

"Well, tell him, with my respects, that he ought to try

Roupell's 'Mensanerincorperersaner.' It's a long word to pronounce, but it's rare stuff for the spirits. Thirty drops to be took on a lump of sugar, and warranted not poisonous if you was to drink the bottleful."

This was not the first time Rachel had heard lamentations at her husband's absenting himself from the dark places where his presence had brought comfort.

Father Romney had urged her to use her influence with him, and to persuade him to take up the work he had begun so well.

"I have seen so many instances of men who begin with tremendous fervour, and cool off and drop away, after working at white heat for a year or two, that I ought never to be surprised by a deserter," he said; "but I thought your husband was of a stronger fibre than most of my young disciples, and that his fire would not have burnt out in a few years. I thought he would not take his hand from the plough till he had come to the end of life's furrow, and the hand dropped in death. Mr. Arden's defection has disappointed me more than I can say."

Rachel could only reply with the same excuse she had made to old Biddy—depressed spirits, languid health. She assured him that her husband's heart was unchanged, his compassion for the unfortunate as intense as it had been in the beginning of his philanthropic work. He knew that she was doing all that could be done, and filling his place while he was unable to take his share of the burden.

Father Romney saw that she was unhappy, and did not press the point.

From Walter Arden, Guelph Place, St. James's, London, to Douglas Campbell, The Hut, Leith, Tasmania.

My dear Douglas,

Your kind, unanswered letter lies before me, and I can only say that it is very good of you to concern yourself about the fate of a wretched being who has not vital force enough to write a letter to the only man in whom he can confide the obscure trouble of mind that makes life a burden.

The dates of your letters tell me that it is nearly three years since I wrote to you. When that last letter was written all was well with me. I was happy in the love of the most lovable of women, an angel of charity and compassion, in whose company I had learnt that the happiest life a man can lead is the life that conduces to the happiness of others. The philanthropic work which I began for love of Rachel had grown as soul-satisfying to me as it is to her. The loss of our child in the dawn of infancy had been a heavy blow to us both; but I think that both of us had found consolation in brightening the lot of other children; and I know that Rachel took comfort from her unquestioning faith in the vague promises of reunion offered by the Gospel and the Church.

During those serene and exquisite years, if I had not forgotten the horrors of the past, I had at least been able to keep dark memories far away from me. I had indeed taught myself to believe that all I had suffered from the haunting presence of an evil spirit, the wicked mind of a dead man, disembodied and endowed with malignant power to harass and torment the living, was a delusion of my own troubled brain—a delusion engendered by long brooding over Manville's tragic death, a state of mind verging on melancholia.

As in our first meeting Rachel's presence had exorcised the fiend, so in the earlier years of our married life I felt myself so far removed from that baleful influence that I came to think the evil had been subjective from first to last—a morbid action of the mind, a phase of mental weakness, which happiness had cured. Rarely in those peaceful years did I recall the words that had once recurred in every hour of lonely brooding, and had flashed across my brain often and often in the busiest and the gayest scenes.

"When you are luckiest, when you are happiest, when woman's love is sweet and life is fair, I shall be near you. There is no path you tread where I may not cross your steps; there is no hour you live that shall be safe from me."

Hideous words, if they could take substance and shape; but common sense would have brushed them aside as an impotent menace of one who could play the braggart even in the moment of death. I was weak enough to brood

upon the ghastly idea till I came to think that his wild threat foreshadowed God's revenge for murder.

Hallucination or reality, I can recall the actual moment in which that evil presence re-entered my life. It was in one of the most brilliant assemblies of the London season, a gathering of wit and power, wealth and prestige, a galaxy of lovely women. I had watched my wife shining like a star of purer light in that firmament of beauty, conspicuous for her simple dress, and for an exquisite modesty which has ever been her highest charm. I was proud of her, happy in her love, a man without a care.

I left the dancing-room, and strolled into a long gallery, in which there were only a few couples, seated in the embrasures of the windows, or loitering in front of a picture or a statue. I stood before a picture of Watts's, at once a triumph of realism and of imagination—Milton's Satan, the incarnate image of evil, the angel in the instant of his fall. And as I gazed, the old horror fell over me like a pall. Again I had that overpowering sense of an impalpable presence, a spirit of evil close at my side, wordless whispers hissing in my ear, a creature not of earth, yet with power to torment mankind.

I turned sharply round, almost expecting to find myself confronted by a visible form, a fiend as terrible as the painted devil I had been looking at; and then I laughed at myself, remembering how my days and nights had been haunted by that impalpable presence which had been as real to my senses as flesh and blood.

From that hour the loathsome companion has been with me. For a long time I fought resolutely against the invisible demon. I gave myself up to the service of my fellow-creatures. I tried by strenuous, unremitting work to escape from the inexorable companion. I struggled to maintain an outward show of happiness, contrived even to deceive a devoted wife; but the continued effort was beyond human power, and I broke down miserably at last, and have had the agony of seeing Rachel's mute distress at a change in me that has made us almost strangers. I have isolated myself in my own house, the home that was once so full of charm, so dear, and so tranquil. Nothing can help me. I have had to abandon the philanthropic work

which had become the business of my life. I can no longer go about among the poor, or consult with my fellow-workers, pursued by the demoniac influence which makes life hateful. I dare not trust myself in society of any kind; lest by some uncontrollable impulse I should reveal the horror that haunts me, and so brand myself as a madman, and end my wretched existence in a lunatic asylum. Solitude is my only refuge; and I must live out my life in silent misery.

To one man only, except yourself, have I lifted the curtain from my mind; and in him I perceived at once a doubt of my sanity. The border-line between reason and unreason is so narrow; and the very people who accept the Gospel miracles in unquestioning faith will question the sanity of a man who believes in ghosts. Liberty is too precious, even in my despairing state of mind, to be hazarded; so I must keep myself aloof, and confide in none but you—my faithful friend of the old undergraduate life. My wife is perfect in her gentleness and forbearance. She has never reproached me for my churlish preference of solitude to her dear company; but I know she grieves over our estrangement, and her sorrow weighs me to the dust. Alas, to have won such a prize, the very pearl of womanhood, and to seem cold and indifferent. But if I were to open my heart to her, and describe my mental tortures, I should but make her life miserable, and risk being suspected of madness, even by her.

You see, therefore, my dear friend, that for such suffering as mine there is faint hope of cure.

Yours in profound dejection,

WALTER ARDEN.

XIX.

It was the beginning of November, and Lord St. Just had been absent from England five months. His disappearance from society had quieted Lady Mary Selby's fears, but it had not silenced the voice of slander. The people who want to think the worst of their fellow-creatures—especially of their particularly fortunate fellow-creatures—opined that the disease must have been virulent, or so drastic a remedy would hardly have been required.

"I suppose he was afraid the husband would make a row," said Lady Lammerton, whose well-trained spouse fetched and carried for her as meekly as Rawdon Crawley during his wife's affair with General Tufto.

"They do sometimes cut up rough, even in this enlightened age," said her friend; "but with the advance of civilization the *ménage à trois* will, no doubt, be recognized by the marriage law. It is absurd for the divorce court to condemn a combination that society in general approves."

"And which helps to hold society together," remarked a third. "Half the houses in Mayfair would be to let if friendship were but a name."

"A name at the foot of a cheque," said another; "that's where friendship comes in."

Rachel rarely appeared in society now that her husband could no longer be persuaded to accompany her. The evening parties in Guelph Place had dwindled to a little knot of old friends and fellow-workers, of whom Mrs. Bellingham and Father Romney were the chief. They were to be found in Rachel's drawing-room almost every Thursday, both moved by sympathy with the wife whose existence seemed so solitary in her husband's house.

Mrs. Bellingham had tried to fathom the cause of Arden's

altered way of life. She had broken boldly in upon his seclusion. She had questioned him, and remonstrated with him.

"I should never have wished Rachel to marry you if I could have thought you would make yourself almost a stranger to her, burying yourself alive among these wretched books."

Mrs. Bellingham indicated the choicest spirits of past and present with an abhorrent sweep of her hand. No woman better loved literature; but what are books when weighed against the living, loving, suffering heart of a neglected wife?

"I declare, Walter, that if I could have foreseen your conduct, I would not have said one word in your favour, when that dear girl was fretting herself to death about you—wanting you to be happy—and afraid to link her life with a heathen."

"My dear friend, you are giving yourself needless anxiety. There is nothing very remarkable in my secluded way of life; and Rachel has never complained. From my boyhood I have been something of a student; and for many years of my life I only lived to read."

"Then you ought never to have married. Rachel chose you because you were—or seemed to be—a kindred spirit, as unwavering as she herself is in the endeavour to make this wretched world better. And all at once, without reason, you take your hand from the plough."

"The hand may have lost its power to guide the plough."

"You mean that your health has broken down?"

"I mean that my capacity for work has failed. I come back to my quiet life in this room as the only life that suits me."

Mrs. Bellingham was not easily answered. She returned to the charge several times; but her most searching questions failed to bring her any nearer the mystery of Arden's conduct. He set a watch upon himself, with that ever-present fear of being taken for a madman, which was a part of his trouble. His guarded replies perplexed and baffled the questioner.

Rachel could not refuse to dine in Carlton House Terrace occasionally, though it was painful to her to appear

there time after time without her husband, since his absence was a cause of offence to her father and mother. Mrs. Lorimer feared that her daughter's love-match had ended in failure; and Mr. Lorimer frankly confessed his disappointment in his son-in-law.

"Idlers and *dilettanti* are a kind of people I detest," he told his daughter, in one of his impetuous moods. "Life is too short, and there are too many things to be set straight in this world for any man to sit in a library and pore over the dreams and fancies of the dead past. Life is too short for anything but living work; and for a man of your husband's age to turn his back upon active life is as bad as for a soldier to hang up his sword in the midst of a war."

Lady Mary Selby's was the only other house in which Rachel was to be met this winter. Here her husband's absence created no surprise. Semi-detached couples were rather the rule than the exception in Lady Mary's set; and if husband and wife were dining in Grosvenor Square on the same evening, it was odds they were at different numbers; or if Grosvenor Square were probable for the lady, one of the smaller streets between that place and Piccadilly would be a more likely draw for her better half. Those smaller streets, with their furnished houses, and temporary stars, had attractions known only to the few.

It was at Lady Mary's dinner-table that Rachel heard an alarming account of Lord St. Just. Mrs. Kelvin was there, the handsome Mrs. Kelvin, who had played for high stakes in the matrimonial game, and had seen her name bracketted with most of the great matches of the last seven seasons, and was still a widow; still frightfully in debt, still not a day older in face or manner, still avid for amusement of all kinds, and still hoping to see strawberry-leaves on her notepaper.

"Have you heard from your friend St. Just lately, Mrs. Arden?" she asked across the dinner-table, in a party of eight, which included a comedian, and his wife, retired from business; a French journalist of the most refined type; a successful novelist of the gentler sex, young enough to be called a girl by her relations and friends, and old enough to be told by women of seven and twenty that they had gloated over her first book when they were "small."

It was one of those cosy little parties which Lady Mary loved, where, if any one said an ill-natured thing, all the table could hear it; a party at which there were no millionaires, nobody who knew anything about company-promotion, or the last boom, or the approaching slump, in the city. It was the kind of party which Mr. Selby endured with a stoic indifference, holding all dinners worthless which did not further his financial interests. He was perfectly amiable, however, always gratified to sit opposite his wife and her diamonds, and to hear her say the fine things whose drift he took no pains to follow. For him she was the cleverest, as well as the handsomest, woman in the world—or in London, which was his world.

Rachel's dark blue eyes met Mrs. Kelvin's insistent gaze with an untroubled look.

"It is some time since I heard from him," she said quietly. "He was at Corfu with his yacht."

"And wrote in good spirits about his health?"

"He wrote of his travels only. He seemed interested and amused. I hope you have not heard any bad news of him?"

Mrs. Kelvin shrugged her shoulders, and looked right and left with a delicate air of distress. She was a mistress of the art of gesture and expression, and made as much play with a swan-like throat and dazzling shoulders as the immortal Becky. Mr. Bayning, the comedian, watched her with an amused smile, thinking how much good acting that was meant for mankind was being wasted on the few. Mrs. Bayning observed her with a merry twinkle in her bright grey eyes, as a good subject for drawing-room mimicry.

"I shall give them Mrs. Kelvin at the Rochforts to-morrow night," she thought.

"I am dreadfully sorry; I thought of course you would know," faltered Mrs. Kelvin, after her graceful byplay. "I wouldn't have spoken of him for the world, if I had known that you——"

"You mean that he is ill—that something bad has happened," Rachel said anxiously. "Pray tell me all you have heard."

"Oh, it may not be all true. It was from a boy I know

in the Italian Legation. Did you know that St. Just was at Naples all through the outbreak of cholera in September?"

"He told me in his last letter that he was going to Naples; but he wrote before the cholera outbreak, and I hoped he would not go."

"Having the whole of the Mediterranean to choose from," said Miss Porter, the novelist. "But with an enthusiast like Lord St. Just, the cholera would act as a magnet."

"Well, he followed the king's example; went about among the people, into their loathsome dens, the most insanitary quarters of the city, into their hospitals. The young secretary almost wept when he told me about him," pursued Mrs. Kelvin.

Rachel was very pale, but perfectly calm.

"He has been among such people before," she said quietly. "It would be no new experience. What happened? Was he stricken with cholera?"

"No; he seems to have escaped the epidemic; but his health broke down utterly. Hemorrhage of the lungs, I believe. He left Naples on his yacht, a doomed man, Donato told me; if not a dying man, as some people thought."

"How long is that ago?"

"Not very long—about a month, perhaps. Donato was at Naples when the yacht sailed for Palermo, just before he came to England."

"Will you ask Signor Donato to call upon me? I shall be at home to-morrow evening from nine o'clock, if that would suit him."

"I know he will be charmed. I'll write to him before I sleep," said Mrs. Kelvin, with eager sympathy.

She was greatly disappointed by the tranquillity with which Rachel had received her tidings, hazarded as a sudden blow that would bring about something in the way of a scene. Lord St. Just had been one of the numerous bachelors whom she had contemplated as a possible husband. A philanthropist, and by no means a millionaire; but still rich enough to pay her debts out of income, without being absolutely crippled. Not a great catch, but it would have been "a position, an establishment, don't you know?" And Mrs. Kelvin was pining for an establishment. She

would have married a man who made lucifer matches, or sold tea, for vast wealth. She would have married St. Just for sheer respectability, and would have renounced her dream of strawberry-leaves.

But what could be hoped of a man who spent the best part of his days going about the East End with a beautiful young married woman for his companion; dining with her, walking with her, spending most of his evenings in her house?

Mrs. Kelvin's voice had led the chorus of slander. She had made mock of what she called the "saintly friendship." She had made mock of Rachel and her ways.

"Does she go about the East End in a short frock and a little cloak, with a basket of butter and honey, like Red Riding Hood?" she asked; "and does St. Just carry a cotton umbrella to shelter her from the rain?"

"And to protect her from all the other wolves."

"He being Lupus the First."

To Rachel's influence Mrs. Kelvin attributed the painful truth that she, like a play that has to be withdrawn after the third week, had failed to attract. She had done all that a clever woman, who had always prided herself upon the "straightness" of her conduct, could do to win a husband. She had thrown herself in St. Just's way on every opportunity, had offered him her shoulders and eyes, her arms, which were a strong point, and even her instep, in the Bond Street shoe which she hoped he would pay for post-matrimonially. She had affected an interest in his philanthropic work, had gushed and sparkled, and expended an amount of fascination-power which might have brought down an emperor; and she had left St. Just cold. Only to the counter influence of a married woman—the very worst kind of rival—could she attribute this frosty temperament.

"Sin must be irresistible for a saint," she thought, "from the force of contrast."

She gave up the chase some time before St. Just dropped out of London life; but she was a good hater, and she kept Mrs. Arden's name written large in her black books.

"I am sorry for St. Just," said Lady Mary, who had been talking to the Frenchman in his native tongue; "but don't let us be lugubrious, or Monsieur Reynaud will think

we are victims of *le spleen*. You will put down this dismal talk to the month, monsieur," she added, turning to the journalist; "but I assure you *nous avons changé tout cela*, and what with the big shoots in Norfolk, and the skating at Prince's, November has become almost the pleasantest month of the year."

"*Moi je le trouve, assurément pour ce soir*," said her neighbour, with an air of being enchanted.

Mrs. Kelvin, having launched her thunderbolt with poor effect, tried to *accaparer* the journalist, who sat on her left, and made him almost blush by asking his opinion of the last audacity in French fiction—if that can be called fiction which invents nothing, imagines nothing, and begins and ends in the vivisection of vice.

Monsieur Reynaud confessed himself ashamed of his countrymen.

"I can pardon the aberrations of a man like Zola, who always writes with a purpose, and has the human race for his province; but these boudoir triflers, these miniature painters of vice in a *crêpe de chine peignoir*, and bestiality in varnished boots, they are only less revolting than they are *ennuyeux*."

"But their style," pleaded Mrs. Kelvin. "One can forgive so much for the sake of that exquisite French."

"English ladies are very forgiving, madame. The books that have most success here are rarely seen in a French *intérieur*. Monsieur may read them, perhaps, in his *fumoir*. If madame reads them, *elle ne le dit pas*."

"And you think the modern Englishwoman, with her classical and scientific education, and her broader views, is rather—shocking? *Hein?*"

"Oh, madame, I would not venture to criticize so exquisite a product of nature as the modern Englishwoman—such as I have the happiness to behold at this table," answered the Parisian, concentrating the adoration of a lifetime in a look, which Mrs. Kelvin's shoulders deprecated with a modest shrug.

The Italian secretary called on Rachel the following evening, before the arrival of her usual visitors, and from him she heard the story of St. Just's life during the month of September.

Signor Donato spoke of him with a warmth of feeling that touched Rachel.

"If there were many Englishmen like him, we should call your island the Isle of Saints," he said. "Like our noble king, he showed himself without fear of the pestilence which had made Naples a desert. Everybody who was free to leave the place had fled, as if the city were on fire. The priests, the doctors, the sisters of charity—all those who live for others and hold their own lives of small account—they alone remained. St. Just was perhaps the only Englishman in Naples during that dreadful month. He gave himself and his fortune to the blessed work. He comforted the dying, and fed the widows and children. Even the priests confessed that he was a saint, and forgave him for not being a Papist."

"I am not surprised," said Rachel. "He would not miss such an opportunity of doing his Master's work. But I hope it will not cost him his life."

"I hope not; but I am afraid he was in a very bad way when he left Naples. I was at Sorrento at the time, and I went on board his yacht to bid him good-bye. He had an English doctor with him, who told me in confidence that he had not much hope of his patient's living through the winter. His pluck might keep him alive, perhaps; but his lungs were seriously damaged."

"I am very sorry. He was my most valued friend, after my husband; the man to whom I looked for help and guidance," said Rachel, speaking of that cherished friendship in the past tense. "He was going to Palermo, Mrs. Kelvin said, when you saw him."

"Yes; he was to winter at Palermo, if the climate seemed to suit him. His doctor was to remain with him."

Mrs. Bellingham was announced, and other visitors followed. Arden always put in an appearance at some time on his wife's evenings, talked for a few minutes to two or three of her visitors, and quietly slipped away before people had been able to observe him closely. He looked worried, and even ill. So much was visible to the most casual observer. Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer, who often dropped in for an hour on a Thursday evening, were both disturbed by the change in him, but did not say too much to their

daughter, for fear of making her unhappy; while Rachel on her part was careful to hide all her apprehensions and sorrows from her father and mother.

She wrote to St. Just on the morning after her interview with Donato. She reproached him for not having told her about his work in Naples, and for letting her hear of his illness from a woman she disliked, and among frivolous surroundings. She wrote hopefully of his future, urging him to do all that medical science could suggest for the restoration of his health. It was at a time when the Transvaal had become popular as a sanatorium for lung complaints, and she begged him, if Sicily failed, to try the great Karoo, of course always with the approval of medical authority. She wrote earnestly and urgently; but with the calm affection of a sister.

St. Just replied by return of post.

"Forgive me for having kept you in the dark as to my work in Naples," he wrote, after thanking her for her letter. "I did not want to trouble a friend with needless fears on my account, and I took care that no one in England should know my whereabouts. The cholera left me unscathed; though I spent the best part of my life among the sick and dying. As for the breakdown in my health, that I believe would have come in any case. I have suffered more after a chill caught on board my yacht, on a voyage of pleasure, than I suffered from the fatigues and risks of my life in the slums and hospitals of Naples. With regard to your suggestion about South Africa, I confess that I should be very loath to go so far in quest of health; or if I went as far, I should infinitely prefer some station in the Himalayas. The idea of India has always fascinated me. It is to me as a dream-country; and I think if I found myself there, I should fancy myself escaped from the dull realities of earth into the land of dreams. My doctor has talked of the great Karoo, which it is a kind of fashion to believe in just now; but when I read of the dust-storms on those arid heights, I think myself happy to be lying here, surrounded by the blue waters of this exquisite bay.

"I am glad also to know that I am within easy reach of England and the friends I left there; for though I am content to live on the Mediterranean, I want to die at

home. It is this desire that has fought against my plan of visiting the South Seas, and laying a flower on Louis Stevenson's grave. You know how I admire his books, and love the writer's beautiful nature. I think the South Sea Islands, to many of those who care for literature, and have not the geographical mind, mainly mean Stevenson's last home."

XX.

The winter was over. April had filled the London streets with flowers, the yellow gold of spring—daffodils, jonquils, mimosa; the yellow flowers flamed in the yellow sunshine; and here and there, even in the East End streets, where Rachel Arden was an almost daily visitor, the glory of a window-garden bore witness of a good housewife and a decent home. Sometimes it was the master of the brick packing-case, with its four rooms and washhouse, who tended the window-garden; and these gardens were generally of a superior and more ambitious order; for the man's stronger and longer arms could do more in the use of nails, and wire, and string, and in training plants; and where there were great effects made with wistaria trained over a wall, or a hardy rose surrounding a window, or a curtain of scarlet-runners climbing upon string, one might be sure that the bread-winner had a taste for gardening, and did not spend all his evenings in a public-house.

Rachel's winter had passed in a quiet monotony of work. The trivial task, the daily round, had been enough for content. Arden had appeared in the old scenes now and then to please his wife; but he had tried in vain to interest himself in her work, or in the people for whom she toiled. The one haunting impression—the invisible presence—made a wall between him and the living world. He moved among this eager, striving multitude like a man in a dream. Father Romney could make nothing of him.

St. Just had written to Rachel several times between November and April, but his letters had told her very little about himself. He had put off her anxious questions about his health with vague replies. His doctor thought

Palermo suited him. His yacht was a source of unfailing amusement.

"We potter about along the coast sometimes when the weather is favourable—a voyage of two or three days; or we lie at anchor and bask in the sun. I think of the East End and the people there, and think what a wonder and delight an hour of such sunshine would be to them in mid-winter. And then I think that some day there may rise the white walls and red roof of a vast sanatorium on this lovely island; or at Capri, perhaps—the Capri of Tiberius. A world which has grown so much better, in its care for want and suffering, within my own short life, will go on improving, until, without any such universal confiscation as the socialist dreams of, the distribution of wealth will come about naturally, from the open hand of benevolence."

This letter had reached Rachel early in March; and it was late in April when she was surprised by seeing a long letter from St. Just among the letters which her husband had opened at the breakfast-table.

"I see you have heard from Lord St. Just," she said anxiously. "Is he still at Palermo?"

"No; he writes from Marseilles. He is on his way home," Arden answered gravely.

"I am glad of that."

"You will be sorry when you hear that he is seriously ill."

"Is that so? Then, indeed, I am sorry. I knew he was in bad health; but he said very little about himself in his letters, and I hoped for the best. Does he write very despondently?"

"You had better read his letter. It is a strange letter, Rachel, and it makes a strange appeal to you and me. Of course, I knew how close your friendship was—that you were to him the world's one woman, in the way of friendship—but I was never jealous."

"You never had cause," she answered, looking at him with a grave tenderness that had something of reproach. "I was grateful to St. Just for his sympathy and advice, when you lost interest in the things I love, and ceased to give me your help."

"I understand, Rachel. I was not complaining. My faith

in your goodness and purity has never wavered. The life I have led during the last two years has been a life of unutterable misery; but distrust of you has had no part in my suffering. If I have isolated myself from you, and seemed cold to your mission of mercy, the cause of my desertion lies far away from my domestic life. You made this life heaven; but another influence has made it hell. And I cannot tell you the dark secret—I dare not—lest you should think——"

He stopped suddenly, with a look of apprehension, as if he had said too much, and then, after a pause, went on in a quieter voice—

"I told St. Just something about myself—more, perhaps, than I should have confided to any man. I believe he thought me mad; and he had good reason."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Rachel. "You must not imagine such a thing."

"Other people would think as he thought, if I were to lift the veil from my life. That is why I mope alone, and keep myself aloof even from you—from you whom I love as dearly as in our first hour of wedded life."

"You should not keep aloof, Walter. It is cruel of you not to trust me, not to let me share your trouble of mind, whatever it is."

"Mental trouble knows no division, Rachel. I can tell you nothing—nothing. I say again, I dare not! But I want you to believe in my sanity to the last. Whatever may happen, remember that I am not mad."

"My dear husband, I have never doubted—and, please God, I shall never doubt—your sanity. But I should be so much happier if you would let me share your life, as I did in the dear days when we were all the world to each other. Let us leave London, and go to some lovely spot in Switzerland, or the Tyrol, where we can live quietly, far away from the world. If you must mope alone, let me share your solitude. I am only a part of yourself. I will not question you, or intrude upon your dark hours. But I want to be your companion again; I want you to know that I sympathize and suffer with you."

"My dearest and best! Alas, alas! to think that you were worthy of a better fate, and that a better man loved

you, and might have made you happy, if I had cut my throat two years ago."

"Walter, how can you be so cruel?"

"Read St. Just's letter. A dying man has privileges. Read his letter, and decide upon the answer."

He gave her the letter, bent down to kiss her as she sat at the breakfast-table, with her head leaning on her hand, and then went quietly from the room, before her tears came, and she broke down altogether.

She had promised not to think him mad—not mad! But if he were perfectly sane, as she strove to believe, what was this mental trouble which he dared not tell her, and which had made an end of his happiness and hers? What was this influence which had made life hell? The change in him was palpable enough; but what of the impalpable, the unknown cause? What could that be but some morbid affection of the mind, some disease of the imagination, which physicians call madness?

It was long before she was able to control her troubled thoughts, and to fix her attention upon St. Just's letter.

Terminus Hotel, Marseilles.

My dear Arden,

You will, perhaps, be surprised that this letter should be addressed to you, instead of to your wife, to whom I have written from time to time during my wanderings in search of sunshine and calm seas; but I have a request to make which must be made in the first instance to you. I want you to bring her to me in my Cornish home, that I may bid farewell to the friend who has been more to me than any one in this world since my mother died. I want to see her for the last time in the home of my childhood, the place I have loved better than any other spot on earth; as I have cherished her friendship more than that of any other friend.

It is a selfish desire, perhaps; and I ought rather to halt in London, on my last earthly journey, and say good-bye to you and your wife in your own house. But doomed men have a certain privilege of self-indulgence, and all the world is kind to them. I know you will be kind; and even more surely can I count on her kindness.

The Conflict.

My days are numbered. When I leave Marseilles to-night with my doctor, I shall be carried to my bed in the train, carried from the train to the boat to-morrow evening, carried from station to station, like a dead thing, till I lie down to rest in the room where my father died, amidst the voices of the sea and the winds, blowing across the moorland where I was reared. I have made my doctor tell me the worst about myself, in spite of the professional anxiety to maintain hope even where the end is certain. He does not promise me many days after my arrival in Cornwall, if I live through the journey. He wanted to take me to some sheltered spot in Auvergne, or to Aix in Savoy, rather than to let me risk so long a pilgrimage. But my heart is set upon dying at home among the old familiar faces of servants and tenants, and to lie asleep in the shadow of the church tower that was my landmark in my rides and rambles, when I was a boy.

Will you bring your wife to Trevelyan, my dear Arden, and let me see the face that has been my dream of womanly kindness and pity, when my eyes are growing dim? I know that *she* will not refuse to visit my death-bed; for her Divine compassion would gratify the dying wish of the vilest sinner among Romney's flock. If you consent, I would beg you to start soon after you receive this letter, as I ought to be at Trevelyan within ten or twelve hours of its delivery; and who knows how long I may be found there?

Ever faithfully yours,

St. Just.

XXI.

Darkness had closed over moor and sea, when the carriage that had brought Mr. and Mrs. Arden from the station drove along the avenue of beech and oak that wound uphill to Trevelyan Manor House; and through the open window the travellers could feel the salt breath of the sea, and hear the distant roar of the waves rolling into the caverns and hollows of that wild north coast. The house stood on a ridge of hill within a mile of the sea—a stone house, built when the last of the Tudors was nearing her end, and added to in the time of Charles the First; a house with a priest's hole, and a family ghost, which, being a purely domestic invention, hatched in the servants' hall, and developed between the butler's pantry and the housekeeper's room, had suffered many changes of circumstance and character—nay, even changes of sex; sometimes described as an infirm old man in a brown Georgian suit, anon vouched for by eye-witnesses as a lovely young woman in ruff and farthingale.

Rachel's eyes searched the rolling stretch of turf, and the wind-driven oaks. A young moon looked out fitfully from a sky darkened by ragged clouds, and all seemed chill and dreary in the uncertain light.

A curtain of gloom falls over a house whose master lies dying; an influence subtle as a supernatural presence; and this house of Trevelyan had the gloom of past ages—the dark centuries when religious persecution and civil war made a hiding-place as necessary for hunted human creatures as a hole in the earth for the hunted fox. All that well-trained servants could do to prepare comfort and cheerfulness for the visitors had been done; and the architectural beauty of the hall and corridors, the carved ceilings and tapestried

walls, appealed to Walter Arden's sense of the beautiful, and his love of the past. But the gloom was there all the same, in spite of blazing wood-fires, and many candles in old silver candelabra, and a dinner-table brightened by the deep purple and gold of old Worcester china, and the pale roses of spring, grown under glass.

The grey-haired housekeeper, in rustling black silk, was waiting in the hall when the travellers alighted; and it was to her Rachel turned, pale and expectant, with tremulous lips—

"Is Lord St. Just here?"

"Yes, ma'am; his lordship arrived three hours ago, by the eleven o'clock train from Waterloo. He is sitting up in his room; and he would like to see you and Mr. Arden before he goes to bed."

"Is he worse for the long journey?"

"Oh, ma'am, he is very, very bad. I'm afraid he will soon start on a longer journey; but the Lord's word will be a lantern unto his feet and a light unto his path. He has been a saint on earth, and he will soon be among the saints in heaven," the old woman said, with streaming eyes.

"Take me to his room, please, Mrs. Roper."

"You have heard my name, ma'am? His lordship has spoken of me?"

"Often and often. You were a part of his childhood."

"I loved him dearly, ma'am; but that's no merit. We all love him. Only I was his nurse, you see; and it was because he was so fond of me that I got promoted to be housekeeper. He didn't want me to leave the family, or to drop into a pensioner; and, as her ladyship's housekeeper was leaving on account of ill-health, I was given her place, though I had no experience in the management of a large establishment. There never was a sweeter child—or a nobler boy—or a better man. Though I'm a Bible Christian myself, and don't hold with his lordship's Church, I can reverence one who has shown himself a true disciple of Christ."

The length of the corridor gave an opportunity for the old servant's garrulous tongue; and Rachel was touched by the genuine affection indicated by the broken voice and uncontrollable tears.

The door of St. Just's room opened as they drew near. Lightly as their steps sounded on the thick carpet, he had heard the footfall for which he had been listening and longing. He had found Arden's telegram in the hall when he arrived—"We are starting by the afternoon train"—and he had counted the minutes till the first possible moment at which they could arrive. And from that moment his impatience had been at fever height.

The hectic flush upon the sunken cheeks, and the eager look in the too brilliant eyes, startled Rachel. Could those be dying eyes that gazed at her with an intense vitality which she had never seen in them before? Could the flame of life burn so fiercely on the verge of extinction?

Speech failed him in his agitation. He pointed to the vacant chair at his side with a radiant smile; and then she heard a faintly whispered, "This is kind."

He was half lying in a large armchair, a hospital nurse standing beside him, and his valet in the background. The room was larger than modern bedrooms. The low ceiling, supported by black oak beams, and the dark tapestry, gave an impression of unspeakable gloom to a mind overshadowed by impending sorrow.

The candles on the high mantelpiece gave less light than the logs burning on the hearth; and in the alternations of leaping flame and dull red glow Rachel had not seen the doctor till he came out of the shadows at the end of the room.

"Nurse and I will leave you with Lord St. Just for five or ten minutes, Mrs. Arden," he said quietly; "but you must not let him talk much, please."

The nurse showed her the restorative which might be given if there were signs of fainting. Eau de Cologne, smelling-salts, everything was ready on the table by his chair, with the little pile of books that had been his comforters in the long hours of weakness and decay.

"It was very good of Arden to bring you," St. Just said, when they were alone. "Can you forgive me for summoning you to this last dismal scene? Yes, I know you will forgive; you have often looked upon sickness and death; you have comforted other death-beds."

"Dear friend, how can you think I should hesitate to come to you—or my husband," she said, interrupting him, shocked at the change in his voice, which had a dull hoarse sound. "If we had known you were so ill, and alone, we would have gone to Sicily to help in bringing you home. We are both of us glad to be with you. Walter has always admired and esteemed you. He is your friend as much as I am."

"Alas! that cannot be, Rachel; he and I are too far apart in our understanding of life. I may call you Rachel now, mayn't I? If I sinned in loving you too dearly, the sin belongs to the past; it is gone with my life. I am standing on the threshold, face to face with my Creator. All earthly dreams are past, and my sins are washed clean in the blood of my Saviour. Those long days and nights on the yacht, lying supine, too weak even to read, gave time for repentance."

"You had so little to repent of, you who gave your life for others."

"I gave them my labour and my thoughts. But the soldier in the rank-and-file does more when he dies to save a comrade. Will you be with me to-morrow morning, Rachel, when the priest who christened me comes to give me my last communion? Will you kneel among my faithful old servants?"

"Yes, yes; but you must not talk any more, St. Just."

"Not to-night; I have to live till to-morrow. But when the celebration is over I must open my heart to you and to your husband. I have much to say to you. You must not stop me then, Rachel. The thoughts in a dying man's mind are worth more than a few hours of his life. And now go, and dine, and rest after your journey."

"Good night," she said gently, bending down to kiss the wasted hand lying upon the arm of his chair; such a pure and passionless kiss as women give to the dying.

She did not plague him with any of the death-bed commonplaces—that he would weather the storm, that he might surprise his doctors, that there was hope still of long years to come. She accepted the inevitable, and bowed her head before the stroke of doom, with the meek submission of one for whom death did not mean the end.

Arden would have visited the invalid that night, but the doctor forbade any more talk or excitement for his patient.

"I believe he will be the better for your coming," the doctor said; "and he may get some sleep, perhaps, to-night, now his wish has been gratified. He wanted so much to see you and Mrs. Arden. He has talked to me again and again of her work among the poor, and of their love for her."

"It is easy to win their love," Rachel said. "They have so few to claim it, outside their own poor homes."

"And they don't get much of it inside, I reckon, if one allows for all those gentlemen whom Miss Trotwood called Poker husbands—the men who come home drunk and murder their wives in a casual way; or the men with irritable tempers, who come home sober and find a drunken wife and no dinner. I always feel rather sorry for those fellows," concluded Dr. Walsh, with a meditative air. "I had a cook once that I should have liked to murder—deliberately."

Rachel left her husband and the doctor to dine *tête-à-tête*, and refreshed herself with tea and toast in Lady St. Just's morning-room, which adjoined the bedroom that had been prepared for her. The housekeeper brought the tea-tray with her own hands, and waited on Rachel, trying to make her take something more substantial than the little bit of dry toast, which she ate only in order to satisfy the old woman.

"Indeed, ma'am, you ought to take something better than that scrap of toast—a new laid egg, now. These were laid this morning, and my brahmas are famous for their eggs."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Roper; I have no appetite. My husband made me eat something at Salisbury."

"But you'd miss your luncheon, leaving home, ma'am."

"Please don't trouble about me. I want you to tell me about his lordship—his doctors—his nurses—all that is being done for him."

Mrs. Roper asked nothing better than a talking licence. She accepted Rachel's invitation to be seated with ceremonious reluctance, but there was no ceremony in her use of her tongue. She sat with the visitor for an hour, talking

of St. Just all the time—his ghastly appearance that afternoon when they carried him into the house; the impression made upon the doctor from Bude, who had been summoned to consult with his lordship's private doctor, who had travelled with him nearly a year, and had watched him day and night from the beginning of his illness, and understood his case better than any one else could, Mrs. Roper opined, though, of course, it was only right to have her ladyship's doctor from Bude—at least, not living in Bude, but in his own house and grounds in the neighbourhood, a gentleman who had known his lordship from a baby, and knew the St. Just constitution.

"It's in her ladyship's family," concluded the housekeeper. "All the Challoners have weak chests. They look strong and fine and handsome, and they're careless with themselves, feeling strong and active, and then in the prime of life they go off unexpected, after a short illness. But oh, ma'am, if there was ever anybody ready for heaven, it's my young master, and it seems almost a cruelty in those that love him to begrudge his going there."

The roaring of the wind and the waves had been in Rachel's ears all through a sleepless night, a melancholy, monotonous voice, that sounded like the voice of death—the calling of the sea.

The priest and his two attendant choir-boys had a stormy walk over the moor from Trevelyan village, confronting wind and rain, with their faces towards the Atlantic, and a tempest coming up from the waste of waters beyond the Land's End. The morning was dark, the sky covered with hurrying clouds, and the distant roar of the breakers mingled with the solemn words of the Communion Service, words broken now and then by the sound of stifled sobs among the men- and maid-servants, who knelt with bowed heads to participate for the last time, as they believed, in the ceremony which they had so often attended side by side with their master in the village church. Never had grey-haired butler and middle-aged footmen thought to kneel beside their master's death-bed. They were all sons of the soil, as much a part of the country where they had been born and bred as the largest landowner in Cornwall. They came of

a race that had lived from generation to generation in the same parish, or in the same cottage, till the cob walls crumbled under the heavy slate roof, or a beneficent landlord substituted stone for cob, and sash windows and flat roof and modern ugliness for picturesque discomfort.

For these the early death of a beloved master meant the break-up of their own lives. Good places were to be found, no doubt, for good service; but where could they be as well off and happy as they had been at Trevelyan? It was not leaving a "place." It was leaving home.

All was over; the Rector and his attendants had gone, comfortably sheltered from rain and wind in the late Lady St. Just's roomy landau. Rachel and the day-nurse were alone with the patient, while the doctor breakfasted below stairs.

He had slept fairly well, the nurse told Rachel; and his temperature and pulse were both a shade better.

"He was restless till you came, ma'am, and that sent up the temperature."

"Will you send for your husband?" St. Just asked, when Rachel had taken the nurse's place at his bedside, while she took her breakfast in the adjoining room, within call. "I want to pour out my heart to him, and to you."

"He will be here directly, I think. He meant to come when——"

"When all signs of a Christian death-bed had vanished? I understand."

There was a discreet knock at the door, and Arden entered the room with hushed footsteps, and came to the bedside, where he bent down to lay his hand upon the spectral hand on the bed, in silent greeting. He was almost as pale as St. Just; and he was slow to put his sympathy into words.

"Will you leave us for a little while, Rachel. I want to speak to Arden alone."

She rose without a word, and moved towards the door, then stopped and said imploringly—

"Remember what the doctor said. You are not to talk much."

"Yesterday! I was obedient yesterday. I am free to-day."

The hoarse voice, the effort in speaking, agonized her; but she dared not oppose him. Excitement, distress of mind, might be worse than that effort of speech. She left the room in silence.

"Arden, it was kind of you to grant my request—pure charity—Christian charity. For I think you must have read between the lines—you must have known that I loved your wife—loved her, and fought the good fight, against love, against sin. I was her friend, her true and honest friend, for years; and when I felt the fight might be a losing battle, I fled from the face I loved, from the voice that was my music—the voice that was my music! Ah, how that line has haunted me."

"Yes, I understood your letter. And I know that you are a good man. I have not believed implicitly in all the professing Christians I have met; but I believe in you, and I believe in my wife. Nothing could ever make me doubt her. She did not know you loved her. You kept that secret to yourself?"

"Till the last hour—the hour in which I wished her good-bye, when I was leaving England, meaning never to return. In that unhappy hour I spoke words which I would have died to recall—words that made our lifelong parting inevitable. I hope you know that I should not have asked to look on her dear face again if I had not known that my hours were numbered."

"I believe that with all my heart, St. Just."

"Enough of myself. I want to talk to you of your own life—the life that may be long, and that ought to be so deeply blessed. I want to talk to you of her and her happiness. Do you know why I courted her society, spent half my life with her, knowing that I loved her too well for my peace? It was because I saw how you neglected her; and because, after your confession that night, I feared for your reason. I wanted to be near her, a friend and protector, against the peril of a husband's insanity."

"I knew you thought me mad."

"No, not mad when you opened your mind to me; yet what might not be feared from a mind in which hallucination had taken the place of reality? But, as time went on, I saw no fresh cause for alarm. You were a most unhappy man,

but your brain was strong enough to keep its balance, under conditions that in most men would have ended in lunacy. But think what it was for me, worshipping her beauty and her sweetness, to see such a flower neglected; to see a marriage, that all who knew you had admired as an idyllic love-match, drifting into hopeless estrangement, a husband in sullen isolation, a wife broken-hearted. After those years of severance she is unchanged. She loves you still. You have but to take her to your heart again."

"And to make her miserable; to let her share the horror of my haunted life; to let her see me in the hour when that spirit of evil holds my soul in thrall; to let her see me as I am for the greater part of my life, a man accursed. What could she think me but a madman? And then would come the horror I have been dreading for the last two years. A loving wife's anxiety for an afflicted husband—physicians called in—interviews with the patient—searching questions—the thin end of the wedge—the secret of my suffering extorted from me—and then the bland advice for self-control—and the certificate—and the asylum. I confided in you, St. Just, which was a mistake. I won't make that mistake again."

"Walter Arden," said St. Just, raising himself in his bed with a sudden energy, "if you believed in God, you would not believe in this devil. Men who love Christ, who live by the light of His word, are incapable of fantastic dreams like yours."

"Yet what if I am incapable of believing in God, or loving Christ, except as a Jewish philosopher of incomparable wisdom and gentleness?"

"Yet you believe in the invisible, the impalpable presence of a supernatural being. You do not shut your mind against the unseen world. You believe that the evil spirit of the man you killed—justly, as you think—has power to haunt your life, and even to enter the form of a dead man whom you loved—to live again, a devil's nature in a human form. You believe in the reality of that which reason should tell you to be a wild delusion of your own troubled brain, and you withhold your belief from the Creator of the universe, and the Saviour of mankind."

"I am as Nature made me. In the propensities and

instincts that make up this being of mine, the instinct of faith in God is wanting."

"But not the instinct of superstition. Oh, my dear friend, what can I say to you, how can I convince you that in one refuge only can your troubled spirit find peace? I tell you, Arden, that in this brief life of ours, on this infinitesimal spot in illimitable space, we are surrounded with the unseen, and we cannot escape from its influence. The world invisible is round us and about us, in our childish dreams, our childish gropings after the mysterious and unknowable, the something near us that is not ourselves; and if we reject the messengers from heaven, we become the prey of the spirits from hell. God has given us minds that aspire, thoughts that break through the prison-house of clay. Somehow, by some half-conscious process, the spirit of man escapes the limitations of flesh, to find the peace of God, or the terrors of Satan. God or the devil! Man must choose under which master he will live and die."

"Why must there be a master? Why should not man be free—free as Huxley was; as Darwin was; believing only in the things that he can see and measure and test and compare; the things whose absolute reality he knows and understands? Those men lived out their lives without the necessity of a God, or the fear of a devil."

"Yes, there must always be exceptions, men of the scientific mind, men of vast intellectual force, who have the power to concentrate their thoughts upon the actual world, who know that they are labouring for a great cause—the cause of truth about material things. Such men can be satisfied without thought of the hereafter. Their work is the work of to-day; their discoveries, their achievements, their triumphs, are circumscribed by earthly limits. The world of sense, of fossils and dry bones, of insect and animal life, is their dominion. The scientific mind asks nothing better."

His voice was hoarse, and he breathed heavily; but the flushed cheek and brilliant eye, the energy of tone and manner, were full of vitality. It was difficult to think of him as a man whose life might not outlast the day. Difficult, agonizing, to think that this ardent, beneficent spirit must soon be cold in death.

Arden was deeply moved.

"I wish to God I were like you, St. Just. But some men see the heavens opening, and the company of saints, where others see only the trackless wilderness of infinite space, the barren wastes of mindless matter—an illimitable universe, with no room for a personal God. I would give half the life that lies before me to have faith, simple and strong as yours, to help me through the other half."

"It will come to you. I believe with all my soul that the light will come; if you will give your mind and heart in perfect trustfulness to the wife who loves you. She will be your guide, Arden, strong in her childlike simplicity. A child shall lead you. Let me lie down to rest, with the assurance that you will be again to her as you were in the first years of your married life. Let no morbid fancy of an overwrought brain come between you and your guardian angel."

"My guardian angel!" echoed Arden. "That is what I thought her when we first met, and when the cloud of horror was lifted from me—the indescribable horror which no words can convey to the mind of another, but which is more real than the sternest realities of life are to me."

"Lean upon Rachel," said St. Just, laying his hand on Arden's with an affectionate pressure. "She will lead you to peace. And now I have said my last word—and last words are remembered when the speaker is no more. Good-bye."

They clasped hands, and Arden bent over the wasted hand with clouded eyes, and went quietly from the room as Dr. Walsh came in, bringing the Bude doctor, his senior by a quarter of a century.

There had been a question between the two men overnight as to the advisability of sending for a London specialist; and both had agreed that it would be useless. The end had long been inevitable. St. Just, always of a delicate frame and constitution, had shown wonderful vitality, but it was only the power of mind over matter. The mischief had progressed beyond hope of cure. Walsh was young, and a disciple of the newest school, full of intelligence, and warmly attached to St. Just, who had offered to take him on his yachting tour, with a liberal salary, at a time when the young man's constitution was in danger of breaking

down altogether from over-work as a general practitioner in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in London. He had left the medical schools eager for experience, and not caring for income, beyond the absolute needs of existence ; and he had been on foot early and late, working with heart and brain, in a practice that hardly brought him the rent of his surgery.

"The late Lady St. Just's people were a family of weak chests," the Bude doctor said. "I am not surprised at St. Just's break-up. But it's a great loss for this neighbourhood, for he was a model landlord. And it's a greater loss for the philanthropic world."

"He was the friend of the poor," answered Walsh. "He would wish for no higher title."

They both said he "was." They spoke and thought of him in the past.

"And title and estates go to a distant cousin?" interrogated Walsh.

"Yes, a small squire near Launceston, a fine sportsman. We shall have a pack of hounds here perhaps in a year or two. The kennels are on the other side of the park, where St. Just's grandfather built them eighty years ago. I've heard my grandfather talk of him."

"But you have a pack of hounds near Bude, haven't you?"

"Yes ; but if we had a private pack at Trevelyan, we could hunt five days a week."

This conversation had taken place on the previous evening, after it had been agreed that the science of medicine could do no more for the present master of Trevelyan. In a few hours, more or less, the new master would be coming hotfoot to claim his own, the cheery hunting-squire, whose modest means hardly allowed of a second horse, and who had cast many a longing look at the spacious stables—room enough for twenty—and the kennels that had not echoed the voices of hounds for half a century. Only within the last six months, when the report of St. Just's bad health had appeared from time to time in the gossip column of the London papers, had the Launceston squire contemplated the future ownership of those admirable stables, and the rapture of improving the empty kennels on modern

principles. The good man knew not yet how near his ownership might be. It was no man's business to inform him of his kinsman's return; and there was so little in common between the two men that no one had thought of suggesting the squire's presence in the sick-room. He had been asked to Trevelyan for a day's shooting now and then, when St. Just was at home, and had been allowed to shoot the covers as often as he chose when St. Just was away; but no familiarity could have made the men companions.

Arden found Rachel pacing the terrace on the south side of the house, careless of wind and rain. He went to her and drew her hand gently through his arm, and walked by her side in silence. Simple as the act was, it seemed to her like the breaking down of a barrier of ice that had gradually risen between husband and wife. She looked up at him wonderingly, and met his gaze of melancholy tenderness, ineffable love shadowed by ineffable pain.

"You have been a long time with St. Just," she said.

"Not long in minutes; but we have talked of things that fill a lifetime. He has been talking of you, Rachel, telling me to love you; as if I had ever ceased to do that, as if I had ever loved woman as I love you. He urged me to confide even my darkest thoughts to you—as I once confided them to him——"

"And you will trust me, Walter? If you only knew how miserable I have been in these wretched years of our estrangement—never estrangement on my side; but on yours the cruellest desertion. I was a deserted wife in our own house, husband and wife sitting face to face day after day, yet miles apart."

"Well, there shall be no more estrangement. If you can live with me and share my burden, I will not creep into my hole and hide my misery in darkness. I will hide myself from all the world except you. But you don't know the shadow you are bringing upon your life, if you are to be my companion. You don't know!"

"However darkly the shadow may fall, I would rather live in it than live as we have been living—you and I, Walter! You and I who were once in such perfect sympathy, who once seemed to have but one heart and mind, except in our thoughts of the world to come. Oh, Walter, if you

could look there in your hour of trouble, you would surely find comfort. Morbid imaginings, fancied evils, cannot live in the light of heaven."

"Morbid imaginings! They are the realities."

"And if you cannot yet find the light—if the blessedness of belief in a Divine Friend and Saviour is denied you, dear husband, you have but to return to the little world of suffering humanity, where there are such real miseries, so many ill-used wives, and fatherless children, and sickly families, toiling from morning till night for such pitiful wages, so many heart-broken mothers grieving over the degradation of their daughters, or the wickedness of their sons. When I think of all that patient suffering, I cannot fathom the mind of a man who can turn his back upon it, having once seen and known it, as you have."

"You think I gave up without a struggle, that I wearied of the work you loved. You wrong me there, Rachel. I thought once, as you think now, that a man might arm himself against all the powers of hell by unflagging labour in the cause of humanity—that the human must vanquish the devilish. I thought that; and I wrestled with my enemy. But evil was stronger than good. Oh, for mercy's sake, don't drive me into explanations; don't force me to talk of myself! Shelter me with your love if you can. Save me from despair, from the peril of madness. I will be as a child in your hands; I will do whatever you bid me, go where you tell me to go; but don't question me."

"I will do nothing that can give you pain, Walter."

Dr. Walsh met them at the end of the terrace.

"Lord St. Just would like to see Mrs. Arden, if she would be kind enough to stay with him for a little while," he said; and then, in a lower voice, to Arden, "I think he wishes to bid her good-bye."

"I will go this instant," Rachel said, walking quickly towards the house.

"Is it really good-bye?" Arden asked, when he and the doctor were alone. "Have you given up hope?"

"Yes. We are near the end; but he is calm and happy. It is the death-bed of a saint."

"He was so full of life and energy half an hour ago, when he talked to me."

"The light that comes before the final darkness. He is without pain. His mental power is undiminished; but I doubt if he will live through the night."

"Does he know?"

"Yes. He made me tell him the truth. All that can prolong his life will be done till the last moment. He has two admirable nurses; and I shall be at hand all day and all night, if he live till night."

"Rachel," said St. Just, when she had seated herself by his bedside, Nurse Marian having withdrawn to a seat by an open window at the other end of the room, "I have done with most earthly things, but not with your friendship. I like to see you by my bed, though I see your face dimly through a pale grey mist. I like to hear your voice."

"Shall I read to you? It would tire you less than talking."

"No; sing to me, Rachel; sing one of the hymns we both love—the hymns I have heard you sing at St. Saviour's. Ah, if you could have known then how your voice thrilled me; how for me it was the only voice in that mass of people, singing in tune and out of tune, with their poor cockney accent, their heart-whole piety, so pathetic in its yearning for the Unseen. Your voice rose up from the multitude like a seraph's—so clear, so pure, so tender! Sing to me, Rachel."

"If my poor voice can soothe you."

"It will lift me up to heaven."

She rose and moved to a prie-dieu chair at the foot of the bed, and knelt with clasped hands and upward gaze, as of one who sees something far away. She sang several hymns, making a long pause after each, while she prayed silently with bowed head. She knew the hymns he loved best; for she had heard him read them and talk of them to school-children, to old men and women, to the sick and the dying. She sang—

"The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine for ever."

And then, in a low voice, attuned to that sad environment,

she sang, "Lead, kindly Light," "Rock of Ages," "Art thou weary?" And last of all—

> "Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
> The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

Nurse Marian was kneeling by the distant window. The doctor had come into the room silently, and after looking at his patient, he too had knelt with bowed head. Sung under such conditions, those hymns were prayers.

A thrush was singing in the rainy shrubbery under the window; but his song was not more pure and true than Rachel's voice—steady and unfaltering, save when, at some too pathetic suggestion in the verse, there came the sound of tears.

"Rachel!"—the voice that called her had grown fainter than before.

She rose from her knees, and went to the bedside.

"Dear friend, I bless you for this happy hour. It was for such an hour as this I came from Sicily—for this, and to talk to your husband as I have talked to-day. He is the lost sheep of the Lord, Rachel. You must bring him home. Oh, my dear, you can do it, for he loves you, and love must conquer."

"I will try," she murmured brokenly.

"And now bid me the last good-bye. I have done with all things dear, till I recover my lost treasures in heaven. Shall we ever meet again? Shall we meet and remember, in the world of emancipated souls—spirits freed from the dominion of flesh? He whom we trust held out that blessed hope to the penitent sinner. To-morrow—the to-morrow of long years—we may be together in Paradise."

His hand was in hers as she stood beside the bed, his eyes looking up at her with unspeakable love.

She bent over him, and kissed the cold brow.

"Good-bye, St. Just," she said softly. "Your friendship has been very dear and precious to me. I shall never forget you—never cease to love your memory."

He lifted her hand to his lips, and kissed it passionately.

"Good-bye, earth," he said, and turned his face to the wall.

She kept back her tears till she was in the corridor outside, where Walsh followed her.

"I don't want to leave him," she said. "I would stay with him to the last if it were best."

"It is best for him to be alone now. He will fall into a dreamy state most likely, and pass away in his sleep. The nurse and I will keep watch."

All through the long spring day there was a silence in the spacious old house, a dumbness that seemed like the herald of death. The servants moved about the house no more than was absolutely necessary, and walked with hushed footsteps. They spent the intervals of their service in their own rooms, reading their Bibles, and breathing many a prayer for a beloved master. Every flutter of a bird's wings as it flew past an open window, every rustle of the boughs in the rising wind, seemed to have a melancholy significance, and to those simple minds whispered of the saintly soul passing from the dull grey things of earth to the rainbow light of the celestial city. The old butler and the old housekeeper sat with their open Bibles on their knees, and talked of the days that were gone—of St. Just's father, and grandfather, of his childhood, and boyhood. The head laundry-maid came to the housekeeper's room with reddened eyelids and pale cheeks. She had been under-nurse, and loved to talk of the childish illnesses through which she had helped Mrs. Roper to bring the young master. The Bible-reading and the rambling talk alternated in Mrs. Roper's room all the afternoon. There was no one but the servants in the lower part of the house; and the footmen had nothing to do but attend to the fires in the empty sitting-rooms, and shut the shutters and draw the curtains at nightfall.

At any moment they might hear that all was over. "All" in this case meaning that serviceable, unselfish life, whose years of reason had been spent in good works. At any moment the stable-messenger might be bidden to saddle his pony and carry the tidings to Trevelyan village; and then the church bell would toll thirty times with slow and solemn sound across the darkness; and homestead and cottage would know that the landlord and master was dead. Inquirers had been coming to the lodge gates all day long

—squire and parson, yeoman and cottager, from all the country round; but none had come up to the house to disturb the solemn silence around a vanishing life. The woman at the lodge had the doctor's bulletin, from hour to hour, and the inquirers left sorrowfully, being told that the case was hopeless.

Arden left the house after his interview with Rachel, and wandered over the moorland to the coast, choosing his path at random, and walking with his face seaward till he found himself standing on that rugged headland "where the great vision of the guarded mount looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold."

He felt his burden lightened after that earnest talk with his wife, his guardian angel, as he loved to call her; but he knew not how long the tranquil mood would last, or when his haunting misery might come back upon him.

The wild beauty of hill and valley, and the granite coast that girdled them, the majesty of rocks that rose like the ramparts of a giant city, solitary and strange as a dream-picture in Christian's journey, helped to distract his mind from his intangible enemy. There was relief in having escaped from the densely peopled scenes of everyday life, to feel alone with Nature. He breathed the purer air; he gazed upon the wide expanse of sea and sky, with a new sense of liberty.

"I have hugged my ghost. I have shut myself in a prison-house with my spectral foe," he thought. "From henceforward I will fly from him. I will fling myself upon Nature's breast. I will worship mountains and rivers, sun and stars. I will cast away the consciousness of this petty stunted individuality, and lose the sense of horror in the sense of infinite beauty."

It was nearly ten o'clock when he went back to Trevelyan. Rachel was walking in the avenue, wrapped in a cloak, her hair blown about by the wind, her face pale with fear.

"Oh, Walter, what a scare you have given me!" she exclaimed, hurrying to meet him. "I was afraid some accident had happened. I thought of the most dreadful things. The stablemen have gone to look for you, and to make inquiries in the village."

"Because I was an hour or so late for dinner? My

dear wife, that I should seem to neglect you, after our talk this morning! I wandered farther than I meant to go, lured on by the grandeur of the scenery—those stupendous cliffs, and the stormy sea, Tintagel, with its grim walls and romantic legends. I have been steeping myself in the wild beauty of this coast, finer than I had ever imagined it. It was dusk when I found myself in a fishing-village under the cliff, and found that I had a long way to walk home. How pale you look! Has the end come?"

"No, he is living still; but he lies half asleep. He opens his eyes sometimes and looks at the watchers, but gives no sign of recognition. Dr. Walsh thinks that consciousness has gone, never to return. Never to return here. I can but think of him as if he were now among the blessed souls in heaven."

"Ah, that is the mystery. Even your creed is vague and wavering upon that question. In a paradise of dreamless sleep, or before the throne of God? You have no promise or assurance."

"'In my Father's house are many mansions,'" murmured Rachel.

"Vague, all vague! The children of Israel—God's chosen people—had no promise of the after-life. They were groping in the dark, and never thought that when they did well or ill they were choosing between eternal felicity and eternal pain."

"Christ brought us the promise. We can trust Him."

"Well, St. Just's life on earth was the ideal life—St. Paul's ideal—to spend and to be spent for others. He can face the great mystery without fear of the issue. Come what may, he has his reward—rest from toil, or joy unspeakable in the world we know not. Have you been with him lately?"

"I was with him for an hour this morning; and then he said good-bye, and I went away to hide my tears. Dr. Walsh thought it best that he should be alone after that. I have been sitting in my room all day. Nurse Marian has come to me from time to time and told me about him. She is a good nurse; but not so sympathetic as Nurse Ethel."

They went into the house together, and the old butler, who had been on the watch for them, ushered them into

the dining-room, where all things were in readiness for the long-deferred dinner.

Rachel urged her husband to eat, having discovered that he had taken nothing all day; but she did not tell him that her only refreshment had been the tea that Nurse Marian had persuaded her to take at five o'clock.

The dinner was a mere pretence of a meal, in spite of the butler's tender ministrations. Who could eat in a house towards whose door the fatal footstep was approaching? Husband and wife sat in silence, listening for that other step on the old oak staircase, the step of the doctor coming to tell them of the end.

XXII.

The thin-spun thread held out longer than Dr. Walsh expected. Midnight struck from the big clock in the stable-yard, and St. Just still lived. He lived; but the end seemed very near—the inevitable end.

"He is sinking fast," Walsh whispered to the night-nurse, who had just taken her place at the bedside. "He will sleep till the last, most likely. I shall go and lie down in my clothes, for an hour or two. Be sure you call me if there is any change."

The nurse sat in the large armchair, watching the slumbering form, the wasted hand lying waxen white on the crimson silk coverlet. She watched the dying man with reverent gaze, knowing what manner of life he had led—a soldier of Christ, disbanded in the thick of the battle, but leaving his record of work well done, having borne such witness as few men bear to the faith that was in him—the implicit childlike faith which had been a lantern to light his steps, and a lamp shining in the distance, far away, at the end of the earthly vista, to beckon and guide him home.

Nurse Ethel was a religious woman, a member of that sect which has taken so strong a hold in the West of England—the Bible Christians. For her the solution of all life's enigmas was to be found in Holy Writ. She went to her Bible for comfort and guidance, in every sorrow and in every difficulty. And now, sitting in the silent room, in the dim light of the night-lamp, she thought of the Shunammite woman's son, and the Prophet of Israel, who gave the boy living to his mother's arms, the boy who had been dead.

Dr. Walsh had told her that there was no hope—none; but he looked at all things from his own narrow standpoint

of the hospital and the dissecting-room. He spoke as a man in whom faith was utterly wanting. Alas! for the simple faith of old, the faith that made the Shunammite mother invoke the Prophet's power, albeit her child was dead. Here death had not yet come; but a good man lay sick, and in case so desperate that mortal hand could not prolong his life by a single hour. But God's hand could. There was no need of the Prophet of Israel, gifted with supernatural power. There was no need of any human intervener. The hand of Omnipotence, the invisible hand that kills and makes alive, need but to be stretched out over that dying head, and death would flee away, and life would come back to the friend of the sorrowing and the poor.

Nurse Ethel sank upon her knees beside the bed, bowed her face upon the coverlet, and prayed with the fervour of those who know not written prayer, the wild outpouring of an enthusiastic piety, belief that knew no bounds, an imagination that soared to the throne of God, and aspired even in this life to a familiar communing with Christ and His saints.

"My Redeemer and my Saviour, Saviour of Mankind, canst Thou suffer the death of this good man? Oh, loving Jesus, Thou who carest for the poor, look down and save Thy disciple and servant."

She lost herself in an ecstasy of prayer; lost count of time, lost consciousness of outer things — even of that motionless figure on the bed—in the fervour of supplications which she thought must needs be answered. She had been taught the efficacy of prayer, taught to believe in a Divine Friend whose ear was always open to the cry of the poor; and it was for them, for the poor and the forsaken, that she was pleading.

A window at the end of the room had been kept open to give air to the patient, and the wind had been rising since midnight. It was a freezing blast that startled Nurse Ethel from her ecstasy, and made her suddenly conscious of the wild shriek of the storm, shrill and loud, with a something human in its note; like the cry of a giant in agony.

She started to her feet, and bent over the bed to look

and listen. The blanched face, the utter stillness, thrilled her with a sudden awe. She held her cheek above the lips of the patient. No breath touched it. She laid her ear above his heart; and there was no sound. "Oh, God, hast Thou no mercy?" While she had prayed, lifting her soul to heaven, full of faith and hope, the life she pleaded for had fled. God had refused to hear. Jesus had made no intercession. What power could she hope to exercise, she who had lived the life of common mortals, she who was not as the Man of God, the anchorite, the earthly saint, whose life had been sacrifice and obedience? Why should *her* prayers be answered; unselfish as they were, supplicating for the life of one whose face she had seen for the first time only yesterday?

The enthusiast remembered that she was a nurse on duty, and crept across the corridor to awaken the doctor. The light tap on the door roused that light sleeper, and Walsh answered her summons instantly, in shirt-sleeves and slippered feet.

"Well?" he asked, as he followed the nurse to St. Just's room.

"He is gone, sir."

"He went off quietly, as I expected?"

"He passed away in his sleep, without a struggle, without a groan."

Walsh bent over the bed for a minute in silence.

"You are mistaken, nurse," he said. "Lord St. Just is not dead."

"Oh, sir, there was not a breath from his lips, his hand was like marble."

Walsh plucked off the handkerchief which she had folded round the shrunken face.

"There is warmth and life in the hand now, and the pulse is stronger than it was this morning."

"Oh, God, I thank thee!" cried Nurse Ethel, bursting into tears.

"I had been praying for him, Dr. Walsh; praying that a good man's life might be spared," she said presently.

"Well, we shall see if your prayers are to be answered by your patient's recovery. I'm afraid that's out of the question. I have seen miraculous cures, Nurse Ethel,

but I don't expect to see my poor friend rise from this bed."

He took his seat by the bed, surprised and interested, but not hopeful.

The stormy wind roared in the old Tudor chimneys all night; but when morning came the April sunshine and the soft April air filled Rachel's room with the glory of spring; that something of unspeakable loveliness that brings the glad sense of life even to desolate hearts; a momentary feeling, perhaps, followed by the bitter cry, "Oh, how can *I* be glad?"

Rachel leant out of her open window, breathing the freshness of the dawn, the scent of pale monthly roses growing round the casement—the first roses of the year—and of a bed of violets in the border below. She had spent the night in sleeplessness and prayer, while Arden slept heavily, worn out by the day's toil. She had crept along the corridor several times in those long, slow hours, to listen outside St. Just's door. All had been still; and she thought that silence meant death. She wept for him as for the dead; not the dead as the materialist counts his lost ones, dead for ever and for ever; but as the friend who has gone before, from the finite to the infinite, from the transient to the eternal. She was sorry with the sorrow that can find instant comfort in hope.

Nurse Ethel came to her at six o'clock, as she had promised overnight, tearful and agitated, but smiling through her tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Arden, I am so happy! He has lived through the night. He rallied at two o'clock, after I thought he was dead. Oh, I shall never forget that marble hand, those breathless lips! I had been praying God to save him, asking Jesus to plead for that precious life. And I thought he was gone; and then came the sudden rally. Dr. Walsh is as much surprised as I was. His pulse is ever so much better this morning, and the temperature not quite so high. He has taken milk and brandy greedily—as if he wanted to live. Oh, dear Mrs. Arden, doesn't it seem as if our prayers had been heard?" added the enthusiast, with dilated eyes, and clasped hands.

"Yes, nurse, we know that our prayers are heard, even

when the blessing we pray for is withheld. The Divine wisdom hears and judges. But can this change really mean recovery? Does Dr. Walsh think——"

"Oh, he won't speak out, Mrs. Arden; they never do. They treat us poor nurses like the dirt under their feet—very polite, some of them. 'Good morning, nurse,' and all that; but no confidence, and always thinking what we do is wrong, if it isn't to the very letter of their orders. No, we mustn't think for ourselves; though we are there to judge, and they are miles away. Dr. Walsh says he's astonished, and that's all he'll vouchsafe to *me*. He'll speak plainer to you and Mr. Arden, no doubt."

"Has St. Just awakened and spoken to you?"

"No; he lies asleep. He was half asleep even when I gave him the milk and the meat jelly. Oh, I feel sure he will recover. He may not live to be old, poor dear, with his weak chest, but he will get over this illness."

"It is very good of you to have felt so deeply for him."

"Oh, Mrs. Arden, that's my disposition. When I take to a patient, I do take to him; and I'd go through fire and water, or sit up six nights running, and not have three hours off in the day. And after what you told me about his lordship's goodness to the poor, giving up all his life to help others, I felt as if I was attending upon a saint. And I never prayed, never in my life, no not even for my own grandfather—for, after all, *his* death was a happy release—as I prayed last night. My spirit seemed lifted up to heaven. It was as if I was kneeling on the threshold of the golden gates."

"Well, nurse, we will not cease to pray, with thankful hearts; and now go and give yourself a few hours' good sleep."

"I'm going to bed, for Dr. Walsh says I *must;* but I'm much too excited and happy to sleep. Nurse Marian is as cool as a cucumber. She don't take to her cases as I do, and she hasn't sat under Mr. Cobbledick."

"Is that the vicar of your church at Launceston?"

"Oh dear, no, Mrs. Arden; none of your vicars for me! I was born and bred a Bible Christian. Mr. Cobbledick is minister at our chapel, an apostle, if ever there was one, and a first-class tailor by trade."

The Conflict.

Arden had slept late, after his long tramp in the wind and rain; he had slept the sleep of exhaustion, and woke refreshed, and feeling himself a new man. He thought of his wife with unspeakable affection. She loved him still, in spite of his neglect. It was sweet to know that. He had let her see something of his trouble, of that darkened mind which made the sun a burden. His mind was more tranquil than it had been for a long time. That profound and dreamless sleep had soothed his nerves. He went out on to the terrace, and rejoiced in the morning freshness, the glory of flowers and foliage, blooming with the luxuriance of summer, in that mild climate, sheltered by the pine-clad hills that rose between the gardens and the sea.

He wondered if the closing scene had been acted during the night-silence; and suddenly, while he was thinking of St. Just, the man who had been to him once as a friend and counsellor, there came upon him the memory of that other friend, the humble friend of his Alaskan journey, his companion in labour and in rest after toil, the bold, strong spirit he had admired and loved. There came back to him the memory of that long tramp by the ice-bound river, when he and Stormont had been told that the end was near; and then there came into his mind, with lurid reality, the horror that had followed the miraculous recovery of a fast-ebbing life.

He turned at the end of the walk, and saw Rachel coming towards him, her white gown radiant in the morning sunshine, and a smile upon her lips.

"I have some good news for you," she said. "I have just seen Dr. Walsh. He is wonder-struck at the change in his patient. He says St. Just may weather the storm. Those were his very words; and he declares it will be a most remarkable case."

Arden looked at her with wild eyes, the look of a man who thinks he sees a ghost.

"Dear Walter, surely you are glad?" she exclaimed, scared by that strange look.

"Glad! No; I can't believe it. The man was dying—Walsh told me there was not a ray of hope. The doctor from Bude said the same. They had given him over. When did the change begin?"

"At two o'clock this morning. There was no one with him but Nurse Ethel. She had been watching him as he slept, and she thought that he was dead, and then the turn came——"

"She thought that he was dead? She had fallen asleep herself, perhaps?"

"No; she had been praying for him."

"Praying when she should have been watching. I must see Walsh immediately."

"He is waiting for us to go in to breakfast. But, Walter, are you not glad of this improvement? You speak so strangely. Surely you must wish that good man's life to be spared."

"That good man's life—yes. If *he* could be spared!"

He went hurriedly to the house, Rachel following him, surprised and pained by his manner. What could it mean, that look of horror, when she told him of the happy change? Could it be that he wanted St. Just to die? He had said that he was not jealous, had assured her of his perfect confidence; but this strange reception of her news alarmed her. Was it possible that he had secretly resented her friendship for St. Just, and that he had looked forward to his death as the removal of a rival in his wife's affection? Could it be that her husband, the man in whose nobility of mind she had believed, was capable of doing her this great wrong, capable of desiring a good man's death?

They sat down to breakfast with the young doctor, who took his coffee and grilled chicken and ham with a professional calm, while neither Arden nor his wife was able to eat. The meal passed almost in silence, and as they rose from the table, Arden asked Walsh to give him a few minutes' talk in the library.

"I am anxious to know your opinion about your patient's chance of recovery," he said.

"Then you had better wait till Dr. Dever has seen him, and we have talked over the symptoms, and then you can have our joint opinion," replied Walsh, who was standing by an open window looking down the drive. "There's his cart!"

The wheels sounded from far off in the crisp morning air.

"Very well, I'll wait," answered Arden.

"In the mean time, to relieve your anxiety, I may tell you that in my opinion there's an even chance of St. Just's recovery."

"And you are surprised?"

"As much surprised as a doctor ever ought to be, knowing as much as he ought to know of the mystery of human life, and the immeasurable power of certain constitutions to fight with disease and death."

Arden paced the terrace from end to end, while the two doctors were with their patient, blind to the beauty of the sunlit park and the far-off sea, showing through a gap in the hills. He spent nearly half an hour tramping to and fro, pausing in front of the open hall-door now and then, to watch and listen for any movement in the house; and at last, when the time seemed endless, he heard the two doctors coming downstairs, conversing cheerfully about the weather and the young wheat, with that air of indifference which tortures a sick man's friends. They went into the library together; and Arden flung himself into one of the Glastonbury chairs in the porch, to wait a summons from Walsh. He waited a little more than ten minutes—minutes of intolerable length—before the young man came out to him.

Dr. Dever was walking up and down the library, a tall man, well set-up, with a fine open-air look, and a keen professional expression, very much the sportsman, but not the less the doctor.

"Well, doctor, your colleague waited for your opinion before he would give me a plain answer. What do you think of this case?"

"Only that it is the most wonderful case I have seen in the last ten years."

"A kind of miracle?"

"As near a miracle as one can expect to meet with in our day. I gave your friend over when I first put my stethoscope to his chest on Wednesday evening. I would have laid fifty to one against his recovery—and there he is, fighting for life, with a will-power I have rarely seen."

"And you, Walsh, do you call this almost a miracle?"

"It makes me more inclined to believe in the Resurrection."

"Oh, Dr. Walsh, we do not bring science to bear on the Gospels," remonstrated Dever.

"The man was sinking fast at midnight; and at ten minutes past three his pulse was stronger than it had been eighteen hours before. It was the arrest of death rather than the return of life. The case is remarkable; but as I—as Dr. Dever and I think, it is the case of an intense vitality acting upon a fragile frame, the conquest of will over matter."

"Undoubtedly," said Dever.

"It sets one's mind wondering what this will-power is that can overrule the conditions of flesh. It certainly is a force outside the scope of medical diagnosis. From my personal knowledge of St. Just, after living with him nearly a year, I thought he would have slipped out of life without a struggle. Never could I have anticipated this fierce fight for existence in such a man."

"And can he go on living?"

"Yes; if he can get over this attack, he may live for years, with care. Post-mortem research has shown that the active mischief may be arrested, and the wounded lung may scar over; and although the injured organ can never regain the functions of the healthy organ, the man may live; if he will be satisfied with a restricted existence, a life regulated by medical control. For the sake of the poor of London, I hope that St. Just may survive this crisis for many years, or even live to be an old man."

"Then, after all our talk of miracles, this case comes within ordinary conditions, within the limits of the possible?"

Walsh smiled at the question, and wondered at the questioner's agitated manner of asking it.

"Within the limits of the possible—yes. I suppose we all use the word miraculous in a modern sense. But it is by no means an ordinary case."

Dr. Dever was looking out of the window, a little bored by this interrogation from a layman. Surely it was enough for Mr. Arden to be told that his friend had a chance of recovery.

"I must be getting on the road again," he said; "I have

to drive ten miles to my next patient. Good day, Walsh. I shall look in at the same time to-morrow. Good day, Mr. Arden."

Walsh went with him to his dog-cart, in which he had put a young horse that he was breaking in for next winter's hunting, and which was employing his superfluous energy on the gravel drive.

"Nice-looking young 'un, ain't he?" Dr. Dever asked cheerily. "Rather too good for leather! But it makes 'em handy, and gives 'em a taste of the hills. He'll feel it a game to carry me over our country, after having the cart behind him;" and with a jovial wave of his doe-skin glove, Dr. Dever took leave of his brother practitioner.

"Country *versus* town," thought Robert Walsh, sniffing the fresh morning air, and watching the smart dog-cart trundling down the avenue behind the eager young horse. And then he thought of the fœtid alleys, the insanitary tenement houses in which his medical experience had lain; the sickness, and hunger, and dirt; the misery he had been powerless to help, and for which the only panacea was the hospital or the workhouse.

Town *versus* country; and the strength and intelligence of the land is all drifting to the town! He remembered a London workhouse under the smoke-darkened sky, hemmed round with bricks and mortar, and he thought of the Union at Stratton, which they had passed on their way from the station; a grey stone house in a garden, with windows that all looked to the sea or the wooded hills; a building that he had taken for the home of some prosperous squire, till St. Just enlightened him.

XXIII.

From Walter Arden to Douglas Campbell.

Klosterberg, Switzerland,
June 15th, 189–.

My dear Douglas,

Strange things have happened since I received your comforting answer to my last letter, and again I find myself dominated by the same hideous idea that made my life by the Klondyke river a time to look back upon with horror: again I find myself in the power of a spirit from hell, recreated in the human semblance of an earthly saint. I think I must have told you in previous letters of our intimate acquaintance with St. Just, the well-known philanthropist, a man of strong religious bias and saintly character, who, during the time of my miserable isolation, became my wife's helper and counsellor in her mission of charity. Unfortunately for the poor of London, he broke down under the strain of incessant work, and after nearly a year's absence in Southern Italy, came back to his Cornish birthplace in a dying state, given over by every doctor who had seen him.

He came home to die; and he summoned Rachel and me to his death-bed. No pang of jealousy had ever disturbed my mind. I knew my wife's purity of soul, and I knew St. Just's fine nature, lifted above the things of earth by a profound belief in the Unseen, an absolute submission to the law of an unknown God. I admired and revered that perfect faith which Fate or character had denied to me. I had never been jealous of his influence, or doubted his honour; but in that letter from a dying man I read the secret of a despairing love; and I felt that I had wronged both St. Just and my wife by the desertion which had given

him the privilege of too close a friendship. I submitted that dying appeal to Rachel; and, at her desire, we started for Cornwall without an hour's delay. We found our friend apparently at the last extremity, but with his mind as luminous as in his best day, and his spirits exalted by the piety of the Christian enthusiast, for whom, in old Sir Thomas Browne's happy phrase, "Death is the Lucina of Life."

He had his resident doctor—a young man who had been with him on his yacht for nearly a year—and two hospital nurses, in close attendance upon him; and these three people assured me, each unprompted by the other, that the case was hopeless, and the end only a question of hours. An experienced general practitioner from the neighbourhood, who had attended St. Just from his childhood, was of the same opinion. Not one of these persons entertained the faintest hope, or expressed the slightest uncertainty. The case had passed beyond the chance of any change for the better.

I saw St. Just on the morning after our arrival, when he had received the last sacrament, and had, as it were, closed the book of religious observances. He talked to me of my mental trouble, which I had confided to him in an hour of supreme depression, and of the influence of that trouble on my wife. He spoke of Rachel with a pathetic earnestness, urging me to confide in her, and to look to her for the lifting of the shadow from my life; to look to her as my guide to that peace of mind which passeth all understanding. When I had clasped his feeble hand, and bent in silence over the emaciated form, I left him with the conviction that we had parted for ever. His words had affected me deeply, and they had inspired me with a faint hope that by Rachel's aid I might escape from the self-torments of the past. I went straight to her, and in that solemn hour, with death hovering near, as I believed, I bared my mind to her as I had never done before, yet keeping the secret of my misery. It was enough to tell her of a mind tortured to the verge of madness, and to throw myself upon her pitying love for help and consolation. I am thankful to say that from that hour she has been my friend and comforter, and that our union has become again as perfect as in those cloudless years when I thought my spectral foe was banished for ever.

The Conflict.

You will remember the history of Michael Dartnell's illness in our hut by the Klondyke river, and of a return to life so sudden, so swift, so altogether strange as to touch the border-line of the miraculous; a restoration to life that was followed by a total change in the character of the man, so that the creature who rose up from Michael's sick-bed, wearing his form and substance, had no quality or characteristic of the creature who lay there at the point of death. It may be that such a transformation in the nature of a man who has gone so near the final dissolution is not unknown to experience, that, in a malady which brings the subject so close to actual extinction, there may arise some subtle change in the brain of the man, the original intelligence fading into blankness, and a new mind being born in its place—new instincts, animal instincts, the vilest side of human nature, where previously the brain had held only generous impulses and noble desires. I have never heard of such a case; but it seems to me not impossible—the case of a mind new-born, and born for evil instead of for good.

But in that last tragic experience of the Klondyke Rapids there had flashed upon me the horrible idea that in this loathsome being I beheld, not my old friend, but a new incarnation of the man I killed, and whose blood-bespattered lips had menaced me with an undying hate—a hate that should survive the clay I saw before me—inexorable, unextinguishable. I had known the fulfilment of that hideous threat in the haunting invisible presence that had made this gracious, beautiful earth a hell; and it was but natural that I should recognize a new form of that horror in the murderer who stood over me on the waters of the Klondyke. Hallucination, perhaps; but to me reality. Only to you, Douglas, dare I write freely of these things, by reason of your dabblings in occult science, and your willingness to consider, if not to accept, every form of the supernatural, whether it bring us "airs from heaven or blasts from hell."

You will bear with me then when I tell you of my instant feeling of horror when on the morning after my farewell conversation with St. Just I was told that he had taken a most unexpected turn for the better, rallying in a manner which his doctor called little short of the miraculous. The night-nurse, a somewhat hysterical young woman, had actually

thought him dead. She told me afterwards, with dilated eyes, how she had held her cheek above his livid lips, and had not felt the faintest breath; how she had touched his lifeless hand; before she went to awaken the doctor, who was resting in a room close by, and to tell him that the momently expected end had come.

History repeats itself, no doubt, in medical experience as in public events; but this close resemblance to the case in the log-hut filled me with a horror which I could not overcome, and which it was difficult to hide from Rachel.

In vain I struggled against the hideous suggestion: in vain I told myself that I was harbouring a delusion that might end in madness. I could not believe that the man lying in the room upstairs, unconscious, but with a vitality that was a marvel to those who watched him, eating, drinking, sleeping, with an animal enjoyment of sensual comfort, was the man with whom I had parted, after those earnest and pathetic words which had gone home to my heart.

The nurse Ethel, whose excitable temperament was kept in a fever by the surprises and perplexities of the case, came to Rachel from time to time with her account of the sick man. She is one of those irrepressible people whose communicativeness is not easily checked; and in those hours when life trembled in the balance and death hovered near, Rachel had, no doubt, encouraged her to talk. As the days went on, all that she told us of St. Just in the awakening of consciousness filled me with horror. She wept as she described his altered bearing—an impatience that amounted to brutality, rough gestures, violent language. She wept as she told us how sweet and Christian a gentleman he had seemed to her during the earlier part of her attendance. She admitted that illness often made a startling change in the disposition of a patient. The best of husbands would be fretful and unkind to a devoted wife; mothers, sisters, nurses even, would be snubbed and treated with rudeness. But the alteration in St. Just was more startling, more perplexing, than any deterioration of character that had come within her experience. The fierce light in his eyes when he was angered by having his medicine pressed upon him, the roughness with which he pushed away the hand that

held the glass, were so unlike his former gentleness. Every detail of his conduct surprised and scared her.

"He is not the same man, Mrs. Arden," she exclaimed, in conclusion.

He had been conscious for twenty-four hours, and he had not asked to see my wife or me; and on hearing from the resident doctor that he might now be considered out of danger, and in a fair way to such partial recovery as a man in his condition could hope for—a patching up of the damaged lungs which might carry on the life for some time—I persuaded Rachel to go back to London with me. We had done what we had been asked to do. We had gratified the wish of a man who thought himself dying; and now the man had been restored to life, and there could be no reason for our presence in his house. If, as I had reason to believe, his attachment to Rachel had been something deeper than friendship, a despairing love kept nobly in check, there was every reason why their paths in life should henceforward lie wide apart. For myself, tortured by the hideous suspicion of a supernatural substitution of a spirit of evil for a spirit of good, every hour that I spent at Trevelyan was a time of horror. I breathed more freely as St. Just's horses carried us to the station; and the thought of our cosy London house was no longer painful to me. The invisible presence no longer hung over me like a cloud. The spirit from hell had now its habitation in mortal flesh, and was no longer a disembodied malignity haunting and overshadowing my life. I had to do now with a man, and not with a ghost.

To write these words is to admit that the horrible idea, which even you may look upon as the delusion of a disorganized intellect, had by the time I left Trevelyan become an absolute belief. It was so. I left the Cornish manor-house with the conviction that the man who was master there was no longer the beneficent and holy-minded St. Just, but the re-incarnation of the heartless profligate, whose vicious career my sword had cut short.

To be once more with Rachel, free from the loathsome presence, was bliss unspeakable. I sunned myself in the atmosphere of her love. We went about among the old scenes and the old faces together, as in the days when we were lovers, whose love had not yet found a voice. It was

my delight to go back into the old paths, to talk with the old acquaintances, who welcomed my return with enthusiasm. I was reproached for my desertion: I was praised for coming back to them. My heart went out to these humble friends with warm affection. They were so human; and there was unspeakable comfort in this humanity, for me who had been existing in that frozen region of mysterious influences that lies beyond the limit of human feeling and human knowledge.

Nothing in that darker London where Father Romney's mission lay seemed to me common or unclean. My fellow-man, however low he had sunk in the vices of the abject poor, seemed to me as an angel of light compared with that unseen enemy from an unknown world. At his worst he was a creature of feelings like my own; and I could appeal to him as man to man. Never had I worked more earnestly, or with better results, than I worked last May, from the beginning till the end of the month.

It was late in May that I met Dr. Walsh, the young medical man who had been with Lord St. Just on his yacht, and had helped to bring him from Palermo to his house in Cornwall, when he was supposed to be at the point of death. We ran against each other in the Commercial Road; and I found that Walsh was now living in that neighbourhood, where he had been practising when Lord St. Just found him in broken health, and carried him off for a sea-voyage.

I asked him when he left Cornwall. I could not bring myself to make any inquiry about his patient.

He told me that he had been in London a fortnight; and then he continued in words that I shall try to render faithfully—words to which I listened with acute interest.

"You see, Mr. Arden, there are some things worse than dirt and squalor, worse even than suffering, before which a man stands helpless, a witness of miseries he has no power to lessen. I thought my experience in this neighbourhood was about the worst that life had to offer me; but I have had a worse experience in Cornwall since you left Trevelyan. I have seen a man whom I loved and honoured, a man whose beautiful nature had been my wonder and delight, as much my wonder and delight after nearly a year's closest

intimacy, the life of every day spent in each other's company, as it was in the first days of our acquaintance. I have seen that man's character changed in every attribute, that spiritual nature degraded to a debased animalism, that lovely temper changed to fierce impatience of the faintest contradiction, and become savage and overbearing beyond endurance; yet the man capable on occasion of simulating every charm of manner and bearing with which a profligate can beguile a woman's simplicity or impose upon his fellow-man."

I asked him if in his medical experience he had ever known such a change following upon such an illness as St. Just's.

"Not such a change," he replied. "But I have known a man become a lunatic after a severe attack of influenza; and I suspect that this change in St. Just is an indication of obscure brain-disease, which might ultimately take the form of acute mania. It would be a very interesting case to watch, for a man who had not loved the original St. Just; but it was too painful for me. I couldn't stick it any longer. I left Trevelyan as if I had had the devil behind me."

I asked him if St. Just meant to remain long in Cornwall. Walsh thought not. He had expressed contempt and hatred for the place. He who had been the most abstemious of men had taken to drinking heavily, to the amazement and distress of the old butler, who had even ventured on a mild remonstrance, which brought upon him a burst of fury from his master.

"I never saw a man so cowed or so bewildered," Walsh told me. "He complained to me afterwards, with tears in his poor old eyes, that it was the first time his lordship had ever spoken to him in anger. 'And I don't think I deserved it,' said the old man, 'for I spoke for his lordship's good, seeing he was only just beginning to get his strength back again.' It was not the last time he was to experience the rough side of his master's tongue," Walsh added, "for the slightest shortcoming in the service brought a storm of abuse on the old servants; and yet I never saw better servants or more careful service. Dr. Dever told me that the household had been trained by Lady St. Just, who was a woman of remarkable capacity in small as well as in great

things. To hear these old servants abused got upon my nerves, and I let St. Just see what I thought of him; and so, gradually, our friendship cooled, and I took myself off."

I asked him if he thought St. Just would live long. His answer was in the negative. Wonderful as the recovery had been, he did not think his patient could last long. The frame was fragile, and the constitution enfeebled by a life of anxious endeavour in the Sisyphus labours of a reformer, rolling stones uphill and having them roll back upon him, accomplishing the preliminary steps in some good cause, only to find himself baffled by the lukewarm spirit of those for whom he worked. Walsh did not believe the wasted frame and injured lungs could hold out many years.

"It is a case in which an intense vitality has conquered death," he said. "St. Just has been kept alive by the force of an indomitable will; and his hold upon life, I take it, henceforth will be the hold of the mind rather than the flesh. His vehemence, his impatience, his eagerness for sensual pleasures, such as wine and food, warmth and sleep, indicate an intense vitality, and a predominant self-love."

Walsh had heard nothing of his patient since he left Trevelyan; but he opined that St. Just would not remain in Cornwall an hour after he felt himself strong enough to travel. He had talked of his London house, questioning Walsh about it in a curious way, as if he had forgotten what it was like. He had spoken of other things relating to his past life in the same vague way; and Walsh thought that his memory had suffered in the illness which had wrought such an extraordinary deterioration of character.

"The contradictions and perplexities of the case are more startling than anything that has come within my experience," Walsh said, in conclusion, "and whenever I can get a leisure evening, I shall write a detailed description of the illness and recovery for the *Lancet*, of course withholding the patient's name, in the hope that it may produce accounts of other cases of a similar nature."

Some days after my chance meeting with the doctor, I saw a paragraph in a morning paper to the effect that Lord St. Just, who had made a complete recovery from his serious

illness of the winter and spring, had arrived at his house in Portland Place for the season.

Rachel read the announcement as we sat at breakfast.

"For the season!" she exclaimed, laughing. "How unlike St. Just that sounds! I don't think he knew when the season began or ended."

I told her that if they were to meet, she would find the St. Just of to-day very unlike the friend she had known in the past, but that I hoped she would never see his face again. And then I repeated Walsh's account of his patient, to which she listened with sorrowful surprise.

She was silent and grave for some time afterwards, and then she reminded me of the morning when I heard of St. Just's wonderful recovery, and of the strangeness of my manner on that occasion.

"You had a look of absolute horror," she said, "as if something dreadful had happened. Could you have had any foreboding of this change in his nature? Had you ever known such a case in your past life?"

I admitted that I had known a restoration to life as seemingly miraculous, followed by a hideous transformation in the nature of the man who recovered; and that I had been filled with an uncontrollable horror when I heard of circumstances which seemed absolutely to repeat that past history. And now that Walsh's experience had realized my fear, I implored my wife never again to think of St. Just as a friend, or even to allow him to cross her threshold as a guest.

She answered with the sweet submission with which she had always yielded to any wish of mine.

"Of course I shall do as you tell me, Walter; and now I have your help and advice in all our work, I don't want any other helper. But all the same, I believe this dreadful change in St. Just to be only a passing phase, a deterioration that has to do with weak health, and not with character. He will go back to his philanthropic work, and the old tenderness of heart will return. I cannot believe that so good a man could become debased and unworthy."

I had spoken only just in time. The weather that day was too bad for our East End peregrinations, and I spent the afternoon at my club, where I had been so long a

stranger, and where I now found myself, as it were, among a generation "who knew not Joseph," so completely had I dropped out of the old easy-going intimacies of billiard and card rooms. When I went home at tea-time, I found St. Just's cards in the hall. He had called twice, the butler told me, and had been very pressing in his inquiries as to when Mrs. Arden was to be found at home.

This decided me upon a step which I had been considering all day; and over the tea-table, set in front of a window in my wife's pretty drawing-room, I reminded her of our conversation some months ago, when she had offered to go with me to some romantic spot, remote from the world, where we might live happily together in a tranquil solitude. She had not forgotten. She was ready to go with me anywhere, near or far; although she would be sorry to leave the neighbourhood of her father and mother, who liked so much to have her near them, and often in their house.

I should add that since our reunion, and my happier frame of mind, we had been frequent visitors in Carlton House Terrace; and I had been received with the utmost kindness by Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer, who refrained from all allusions to my past isolation, my churlish refusal of their hospitality.

And now I felt that London would be intolerable. I could not live in peace in the city that held St. Just. It would be hopeless to try to keep him at a distance. The indomitable will which I had known on the shores of the Yukon river, the brute force that had flourished in the Miner's City, would again be set in opposition to me and my happiness, this time under a smoother outward garb, with perhaps even some semblance of refinement. And this time the point of attack would not be myself, but the wife I adored, the lovely and innocent woman whose pure mind could not conceive the wickedness of a spirit from hell.

From hell! Laugh at me, the unbeliever, to whom all the hierarchy of heaven has seemed as mythic as the Homeric gods! I have learnt to believe in a hell; a bottomless pit peopled with evil spirits; a hell from which the children of darkness are sent out to war against the children of light.

I have advanced so far from the barren waste of materialism. I have learnt to believe in devils.

My sweet wife assented without a murmur to an indefinite period of separation from her kith and kin, and from the work which she loves only a little less than she loves father and mother. It was decided that we would go first to Klosterberg, a village above the Lake of Thun, which I had discovered in my Swiss rambles, a quiet little place, four thousand feet above the sea, a place of wooded hills, and winding paths, and a luxury of wild flowers; and it is from this delicious retreat, which is happily known to very few people at this present time, that I am writing to you.

We have found a châlet on the slope of a wooded hill above the village; a humble wooden house, with wide covered balconies on each side, and a façade decorated with pious adages, a garden running over with common English flowers, which here have larger and more luxuriant blossoms, and a more brilliant colouring, than in England. We have our man and maid, old and tried servants both, and three stalwart Swiss maidens in short skirts and velvet bodices, adorned with massive silver chains. We wander in the woods, or sit in picturesque spots with the books we love best, and in the tranquil afternoons sit in our garden, and dream our day-dreams to the music of the cow-bells in the pastures that slope from our hedge, at an acute angle, down to the shore of the lake. We have adopted a St. Bernard puppy, which Rachel adores; and she has found something to do in visiting the peasants, and in ministering to their children, most especially to the poor half-witted creatures who are too common in this part of the world; and I think I may say that we are perfectly happy. But how long this elysian bliss may last I know not. For me there must ever be a shadow and a fear, while that spirit of evil walks the earth, in palpable or impalpable form.

XXIV.

"ST. JUST has chucked the East End," was the careless comment of the clubs, after the well-known philanthropist had been seen about London in those resorts of pleasure where he had been a stranger hitherto.

The men of his own age, men about town, the idle and the dissipated, who had looked upon the philanthropist as a creature of another world, a prig, perhaps a hypocrite, and most certainly a person whose acquaintance they did not desire, were surprised and amused by the change which had reduced him to their own level, a haunter of the music-hall and the night-club, a worshipper of venal beauty, a patron of prize-fights, a determined backer of his fancy on the race-course, winning or losing with an equal imperturbability.

"At this rate he will soon run through his money," said a man who had watched his aspect under heavy losses.

"Oh, he wins much oftener than he loses," said another. "St. Just has a long head, and knows how to make a safe book."

"There's no more desperate rake than a reformed saint," said a third speaker. "When I meet St. Just on the prowl in the wickedest streets of London, after two o'clock in the morning, and remember him on the platform at a temperance lecture, or as a leading light in rescue work, I find myself echoing Macbeth's question—

> "'Can such things be, and overcome us like a summer cloud,
> Without our special wonder?'"

"My dear fellow, there are very few things that can't be, in this enlightened century; and the stranger the thing is the more likely to be true."

To the London world in general St. Just's new mode of life was a matter of slightest importance; but to the little

world of philanthropic London his defection was a heavy blow. His old friends left the big house in Portland Place, surprised and wounded, after being told that he meant to cut his connection with the numerous charitable organizations of which he had been the generous and honoured leader. Seldom in the history of philanthropic endeavour had there been so sad a falling away. His manner and his words had an insolence that forbade argument; and men who had admired and loved him left his house in sorrow and in anger, shaking the dust off their feet, and meaning never again to cross his threshold, while a Jewish missionary, white-haired and patriarchal, spat upon the renegade's doorstep, in solemn abjuration. He had talked of his past work with a brutal levity, telling them that he was sick of the poor and all their ways; a rabble of ungrateful curs, who would drain a man's last drop of blood like vampires, and leave his carcase to rot on a dunghill.

"You have been very near the gates of death, St. Just," said an elderly Rector, from the east of London, an indefatigable labourer in a troublesome vineyard, where the vines for the most part brought forth wild grapes, very sour and bitter to the taste. "You have been through the valley of the shadow; and upon most Christians such an experience has a softening influence. A year ago, when you bade us good-bye in this house, we left you in sorrow, few of us hoping ever to see your face again. And now I tell you frankly that I would rather that had been our last parting in this world, than that I should hear you talk as you have talked to-day."

If Lord St. Just's altered character made but a slight impression upon the men among whom his new existence was spent, it created a considerable sensation among the women whose society he cultivated. He was unpopular in masculine circles; for his splendours and arrogant bearing were accounted "bad form;" and he took no trouble to make friends among his own sex. He was a fine card-player, but he played with a ferocious intensity which made him disliked either as a partner or an opponent; and men who owned race-horses soon began to think of him as a bringer of bad luck, since on several occasions the favourite had

gone down before some rank outsider upon which St. Just was afterwards discovered to have piled his money. Men rather avoided him; but upon the women of that class which lives only for amusement, St. Just exercised a potent influence. The mothers of fair daughters looked doubtfully upon him; since at his rate of living the St. Just property could not hold out many years, and he could not therefore be considered a good *parti;* but the daughters listened with a too indulgent ear to his insidious flatterings; and the semi-detached wives, who could regulate their existence according to their own fancy, cultivated his society with a reckless indifference to character or morals, trifling with his attentions; as the moth glances across the flame, confident in the strength of his wings, to escape the destroying fire.

Lady Mary Selby was conspicuous among that particular set in which St. Just shone as a star. She was one of the women who had taken him up; and she made him the ornament of those small dinners for which she was celebrated, dinners at which the women all belonged to her own esoteric circle, and at which the men came from all the four winds—literary, musical, painters, sculptors, architects, actors, journalists, inventors, speculators; the notorieties of the passing hour, forgotten next year. These were charmed to meet St. Just, whom they regarded as an interesting study, a modern D'Orsay, whose foppery was spiced with the insolence of an age of free thought in art and morals; and as none of these transient acquaintance presumed to be in love with Lady Mary, St. Just had the field to himself.

Mrs. Kelvin contrived to be at most of these merry little parties, going so far even as to ask her friend to ask her, if there were too long an interval between the invitations.

"Your dinners are adorable; and you have such a power of attracting the right people," she said. "Don't forget me, Mary, when you have any one extra nice."

Two years ago Mrs. Kelvin had given up St. Just in despair. She was now more hopeful. The shoulders and arms and swan-like throat evidently made an impression; the flashing glances of fine eyes were no longer ineffectual fires. She felt that there might have been a chance of a baron's coronet on her writing-paper, if Mary Selby had not

been in the way; handsome, daring, and not wanting the man for a husband, which might make all the difference in her value to the man himself.

Lady Mary had avoided even the faintest approach to flirtation, since the scene in the Parisian restaurant. People who had talked about her in the past had left off talking, or agreed to praise her for her goodness in putting up with such a husband as Selby; not giving her credit for really liking the man as a friend and comrade, if not with a romantic attachment. Selby worshipped his handsome wife, and made her the confidante of all his financial schemes, associating her with every success; and she had gradually become keenly interested in the operations by which money was doubled or quadrupled on the stock exchanges of Europe. Her subtle brain delighted even in the risks, the touch-and-go of a financier's career, being assured that Selby would never hazard the house that sheltered her, or the income that maintained her comfort. He had resources with which he could afford to gamble, a capital so far beyond the needs even of a fine lady, that it seemed justifiable to run big hazards in order to achieve big results. He laid all his plans before his wife. He had the highest opinion of her judgment, and a superstitious belief in her luck. Theirs was an ideal union, as compared with the marriages of most of their neighbours.

Mary had always prided herself upon keeping "straight," and never till she met Konstantin Manville had her honour been in peril. That peril had left her mind and conscience seared and branded; as of one who had passed through the fiery furnace of sin, and about whom the smell of fire still hung. She remembered the man with horror, yet remembered a fascination that had made him irresistible; and she remembered with a deeper horror that period after his death, in which she had been perpetually haunted by his image, a shadow that made solitude unbearable.

She pretended at first to ridicule the change in St. Just; but by degrees the man began to exercise a subtle influence which made his society almost a necessity to her. He gave new colour to her life, and made old things seem hateful. She could not even pretend to be interested in her husband's financial operations. She turned a cold eye upon

his pass-book, which she had been wont to accept as the most attractive form of literature. Gain or loss, thousands or hundreds of thousands, on the right hand or the left, no longer concerned her. She told Selby that figures made her head ache; and he shut the book submissively, with spirits dashed by her coldness, having thought to astonish her by the evidence of a *coup* on the mineral market.

Alas, for Mary Selby! She had entered upon a new phase of her existence, in which she cared no more for loss or gain, or for any of the common things of this work-a-day world. What was the influence that subjugated her? Was it love or fear? It seemed to her sometimes that there was more of repulsion than of attraction in the sensations which St. Just's presence evoked. She feared his coming; yet life was dull and motiveless in his absence. There were moments when the sound of his voice, a flashing glance from the grey eyes, a word, a gesture, recalled days that were gone, an infatuation that she remembered with shame, for which she had wept remorseful tears, and whispered penitential prayers, on her knees in one of those dim churches she loved, where the muffled bass of the organ and the faint odours of incense seemed to belong to a better world. She had repented of that unholy dream. She knew that she had sinned in thought, and that she had been on the brink of hell. She recalled Manville's poisonous words in the box at the Paris opera-house, when they two sat alone in the shadow of the velvet curtain, when he held her hand for the last time, and breathed his passionate prayer in her ear, while the harsh brasses in the orchestra, the clang of cymbals, and beat of drums, rang loud in the pandemonium below. That low whisper was heard above all the uproar of voices, and dancing feet, and cornet and trombone. She knew that she had been on the edge of the pit that night, the Tophet to which fallen women go down, lost to their place and name. Only her brother's interposition had saved her. From the supper-room to the Vienna express, *en route* for Petersburg, would have been the next stage in her life-journey. She knew that her resolution had begun to waver, that a will-power stronger than her own was gaining the mastery.

She remembered her vision of him as they found him

two days afterwards, lying alone under the open sky, in a shabby outskirt of the great city, in his blood-stained shirt. His image had haunted her with a maddening persistence for a year after that dreadful doom. She had not dared to be alone, had scarcely dared to look round, even in the midst of a brilliant assembly; lest she should see the man himself, the dead man alive, with the mysterious life of ghosts, pointing to the mortal wound, killed because of her folly.

And now, after years of peace, something of that old feeling had come back. Mind and senses again were subjugated. She was no longer Mary Selby, the woman of the world, the kindly, generous, honest wife of an honest man. She knew that she was at heart a wanton. She was glad of her husband's absence. She listened for a footstep. She counted the hours of St. Just's absence. She was under a spell. Was it love or fear? She knew that a thrill of fear stirred her heart at his approach; that the sound of his voice subjugated her, as lions are subdued by the lion-tamer. She had made up her mind to keep to that straight line which she had drawn for her future life, when she resigned herself to the humdrum of a loveless marriage. She had asked herself which was best, wealth or love? a life of ease with all the things she wanted, or a brief dream of bliss—a honeymoon and an awakening? She had seen such marriages among her bosom friends—a year of infatuation, and then grumblings and lamentings about the general behaviour of "that man." And she had taken Selby for her mate deliberately, meaning to use him well, to play the game of married life fairly, with no hidden card, no stealthy revoke.

She was happy—happy in that existence of fashionable humdrum, content to move in the same circle, monotonous as a steam merry-go-round in a country fair—when Manville came across her path. He impressed her at once. Here was some one at last who did not belong to the world of humdrum. He was unconventional to the verge of brutality. His eyes had flashes of lurid light, his deep-toned voice had accents that were strange to her. His strangeness captivated her fancy. She admired him at first as she might have admired a wild beast in the Zoological Gardens, a

something handsome and terrible that was not of her world. Then when he became too attentive, following in her footsteps wherever she went, laying traps in order to have her alone with him, in the brief snatches of *tête-à-tête* that are possible in the modish merry-go-round, she found herself growing afraid of him. He had the air of a man who knew not failure—the successful man, the born master of men, still stronger in his mastery of women. She recoiled from him. Her womanly instincts told her that he was dangerous. She was cold, even uncivil, to him, and kept him at bay; but she could not make up her mind to break with him altogether. His influence over her was like witchcraft. She shuddered at the thought of his power; and in her inmost soul she knew that he belonged to the sons of darkness; yet only death was strong enough to break the spell.

And now, as her acquaintance with St. Just grew closer, the memory of that one romantic episode in her life, the passion, the danger, the guilt of it all, came back upon her with vivid power. Again she saw the vision of the blood-bespattered form, lying abandoned in the desolate waste. She knew not how or why those old feelings—the sense of subjugation, the thrill of love and fear—should have again blotted out the common things of life, and made the beaten round odious. Money-getting, money-spending, jewels, fine clothes, a better house, a better *chef*, better horses, better dogs, than her legion of dearest friends had! These things had satisfied her in the last five years; and now, as it were in a moment, as with the stroke of Harlequin's bat, how trivial, how futile, how detestable, the vulgar commonplace existence had become! She felt a wild longing to escape from it all. Alone, if it were possible; to escape from the lover, and the Golgotha he had made of her life. She was not a vicious woman. She could not even imagine herself yielding to the tempter. But she was wretched; and her days and nights were shadowed by a nameless terror. It was as if she felt herself on the slope that leads to hell, and felt a hand dragging her down, a hand that was strong as iron, yet tender as passionate love, the irresistible hand of the tempter.

Archer Stormont and his pretty American wife had crossed from New York in the newest and largest liner, and were

treating themselves to a London season. They had taken a first-floor flat in Mount Street, the best and most expensive that the Mayfair house-agents could find for them. Mrs. Stormont was not boastful about her wealth; but she saw no harm in mentioning that money was no object. "We want just the very best diggings you can find for us," she told the agent.

She met Lady Mary at the Lorimers two days after landing, and wanted to swear eternal friendship on the spot.

"My husband positively doats upon your brother," she said; "so I think you and I ought to be pals. I admire you more than any one I've seen this side. Your frock is just perfect, and your figure is equal to it. But, of course, you know that. Don't suppose I'm pushing. I'm only open-hearted; and I must say what I think straight out. I've come to this side to enjoy myself, and make nice friends. Archer did uncommonly well in the North-West—your brother the same, by-the-by, and poppa's operations in grain have just trebled Archer's capital; so you see expense don't stop us in anything. I mean to give London an eye-opener before I go back."

Mary asked what kind of eye-opener.

"Well, I guess it will take the shape of a dance; but I'm bothered how to lift it out of the commonplace. Your London balls are done so well nowadays, that it is difficult to imagine how one could beat the record. I want to strike out a line—something quite new and a bit eccentric. But how is it to be done? The *café chantant* is played out; or I'd have got some singers over from Paris—some of the risky ones. I believe I shall be driven to make it a water-party."

"A water-party and a dance! That seems a difficult combination."

"Not for any one that has the inventive faculty and the dollars. I've got both, thank Providence."

Lady Mary was amused. Vanessa's delicate prettiness and frank vulgarity made a piquant mixture. She invited Mrs. Stormont to her next little dinner—a dinner of six—Mrs. Kelvin, Mr. and Mrs. Stormont, Lord St. Just, and Sir Frederick Marwood, a guardsman, who wrote verses of the most advanced character, and published them in a

luxurious binding at his own expense. Mr. Selby was at Liége, acting like an octopus upon an embryo railway, which he meant first to strangle as a Belgian enterprise, and then to launch with an English company.

It was one of Lady Mary's most successful dinners. Never had Mrs. Kelvin's shoulders been more dazzling, her Parisian diamonds more brilliant, or her speech more daring. Even the outspoken Vanessa was astonished at the startling propositions flashed across the table by the time the ices were being handed.

"I didn't mind the company," she told Archer, afterwards, "but I believe I was as red as a peony when I had to look at the servants."

They adjourned *en masse* from the dinner-table to the smoking-room, built at the back of the house, over unornamental space that had once been called a garden; a room with a movable roof, which was raised on a night like this, letting in the cool air, with glimpses of stars in a purple sky. The room was furnished with an Oriental luxury of divans and pillows, covered with gold inwrought brocade, rich and ancient fabrics, plundered from the vestiaries of old Italian churches, the copes of Renaissance bishops.

The three women smoked their cigarettes lightly and delicately, with an airy indifference to the charm of tobacco that made smoking coquetry, and not vice.

Vanessa, who was primitively egotistical as a child of seven, could talk hardly of anything but her coming party.

"I don't want it to be passed over in the paper with three lines—'Mrs. Stormont's party was a great success,' or something mawkish of that kind. I do want my party to stand alone. I've been thinking of a water-party."

"Admirable!" exclaimed Sir Frederick. "A water-party would be new. Eighteenth-century to the fortieth power—suggestive of Sir Plume and Belinda."

"Never heard of the lady. Is she one of your professional beauties?" asked Vanessa.

"Alas!" sighed Sir Frederick, "Belinda belongs to the past. She has gone up aloft among the constellations, after her stolen ringlet. I congratulate you on your idea, Mrs. Stormont. A water-party in this tropical weather would be of all things the most delicious. But you must

not waste your July, and eighty in the shade, on long invitations. A week at most can be hazarded. Send out your cards the instant they are ready. St. Just and I will put it about that your party will eclipse everything ever seen; and people will throw over their engagements to go to it. And then you need not start till midnight; and people can come on to you after other things."

"Yes, that's about the size of it," replied Vanessa, elated, having found a man who understood her. "Will you help me through with it, Sir Frederick? I'll do just whatever you tell me. Money no object."

"If money were an object, dear Mrs. Stormont, it would be futile to attempt anything of the kind. But if Mr. Stormont approve, I shall be charmed to run the thing for you."

"Archer! He never disapproves. He knows when it comes to entertaining the swells he's got to take a back seat."

Stormont had been telling Mrs. Kelvin Chicago anecdotes, racy of the soil, and received with silvery laughter; although the lady's attention had often wandered to the conservatory beyond the curtained archway at the end of the room. It was not a large conservatory, space in Grosvenor Square being a difficult problem for the architect; but it was large enough to contain a few fine palms, a screen of Marechal Niel and Niphetos roses, with a bank of choice carnations in front of them; it was also large enough to hold two luxurious armchairs, in which Lady Mary and St. Just were seated, the lady's white brocade train and the point of a jewelled shoe just visible between the Oriental curtains, and the sound of lowered voices faintly audible to one keen listener.

"It's the old, old story," thought Mrs. Kelvin. "What kind of chance can any marriageable woman have while the married ones are such abominable flirts?"

The raciest American stories left her cold.

"Let us hear what Sir Frederick is saying about Mrs. Stormont's party," she said, whereupon the conversation became a quartette; but there was not a word more about the party.

"It is to be a surprise," Sir Frederick said, "and nobody except Mrs. Stormont and me is to know anything about it."

"Isn't it lovely?" exclaimed Vanessa; "a kind of gun-powder plot."

Engravers were expeditious, and Mrs. Stormont's cards were sent out on the following evening.

"Mrs. Stormont requests the pleasure of Lady Blank's company at a river-party on Tuesday, July 13th. Boats will leave Hammersmith pier at midnight. Carriages to be ordered at 4.30 a.m. at Vauxhall Station, L.S.W.R."

XXV.

The elements were kind to Vanessa. The night of her party was blest with a purple sky, in which the stars looked nearer and brighter than their wont, and a sultry stillness which seemed almost tropical. Airy gowns and feathered cloaks were scarcely stirred by the soft warm air, as Vanessa's guests alighted from the line of carriages on the bridge, a line that extended all the length of the road as far back as the old parish church, where the deep-toned clock was striking the first hour of morning before the last carriage had deposited its occupants on the bridge, and the last of the ten electric launches had moved from the pier.

One o'clock, and even Hammersmith—with silvered roofs and glorified chimneys, under the moon that rode triumphant in a dark blue sky, the moon in her fullest, maturest beauty—had a picturesque semi-Dutch appearance, as wharf and warehouse lay fast asleep.

The Thames, under that enchanting light, rippled and danced like a river of molten gold; and the shore, the poor suburban shore that was once only a line of willows against a background of cornfields—even the shore of villadom had a vague charm when seen betwixt purple sky and golden river.

The midnight assembly was a success. It had allowed people to go to other parties, to prime themselves for pleasure. Everybody had dined somewhere. Most of the young people had come away from dances they had just looked at—a valse, an ice, and good-bye.

"Going on to Mrs. Stormont's." "A long drive!" "Ridiculous, ain't it?" "Haven't the least idea what's going to happen." "An American surprise party, don't you know." "Rich?" "Oh, stupendously." "Sure to do us well."

And now on the ten launches, each holding thirty people,

the ripple of animated talk was louder than the ripple of the moonlit water. A smaller launch carrying an orchestra headed the procession, and the music floated back loud or low, as distance varied—gay operatic music, bridal marches, famous waltzes, familiar serenades, melodies that all the world loves, from *Lohengrin*, *Faust*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni*, the music that thrills with old memories and vanished loves. And there were intervals when reeds and brasses were mute, and a trio of strings played some old song that once filled all the air—"Good-bye, Sweetheart," "Come into the Garden, Maud."

One old lady in a cloak, brilliant with peacock plumage, wept quietly in her corner when that last song was played, wept to think that Sims Reeves was dead, and that she was no longer young.

Everybody agreed that it was an enchanting party. People were curious; but no one cared much whither the boats were going. It was enough to exist in that delicious atmosphere, sitting by the girl one loved, perhaps, or the man one wanted to marry, with ices and tea and coffee in abundance, and all manner of possibilities, between dark and daylight. Alas! dawn would come too soon, and carriages at half-past four. Brentford clock chimed the third quarter after one, as the boats passed the fair lawns of Syon House, a sheet of white light, and then plunged into the dark shadow of the trees on the island below Isleworth ferry, which looked like a home for ghosts.

"I'm sure ghosts live there," said Vanessa; "the ghost of Pope, perhaps."

"Pope has an island more convenient to his grave."

"The Eel Pie, where there's an inn, and people drink beer," cried Vanessa, disgusted. "No, he would much rather haunt a desert island like that."

"Too many rats," said her companion.

Vanessa was on the last of the launches. She knew her duties too well to leave the pier till the last of her guests had embarked. She would like to have been on all the boats, flitting from group to group, the moving spirit of the scene; but she knew that her time was coming.

Lady Mary Selby and Lord St. Just were in the leading

launch, sitting in a shadowy corner side by side, and talking in undertones. They had been among the earliest arrivals at Hammersmith, driving down together in the lady's neat little brougham, balanced lightly on C-springs. They had dined together, and alone. St. Just had supplicated for a *tête-à-tête* dinner.

"Are we never to be together, always to be performing before an audience? Can I never look into your eyes, or hold your hand a moment longer than your troop of casual friends? Mary, we *must* be together to-night."

The must—impassioned, imperious, which would have seemed unpardonable from any other lips—conquered.

"We shall set people talking," she said.

"What do we care for people? I count all the world rabble when I have the one adorable woman sitting opposite me. Let us dine *tête-à-tête* for once in our lives. Shall it be in your house, or at the Savoy?"

"At the Savoy, if it must be. Just a table in a window in the room where all the people dine."

But when the evening came, St. Just conducted his guest to a small room facing the river, a room that had been made into a bower of roses. The windows were open, and the newly risen moon was looking in upon them, a shining disk, orange-red, out of the vague purple of the night.

"This isn't fair, St. Just," Mary said angrily. "I told you we were to dine in the public room. Nobody could have said anything malicious about that; but this is just the kind of thing to set them talking."

"The roses, or the moon, or what? Do you think that would have been a *tête-à-tête*, Mary, with people jabbering at the next table? Do you suppose I wanted to dine with you, hemmed round with curious eyes and deafening chatter? One of your *parties carrées* in Grosvenor Square would have been better than that. I wanted to have you to myself—my companion, my friend, soul of my soul, heart of my heart—just for one delicious hour before we go on to Mrs. Stormont's party."

He called her Mary unreproved. The hour of quibbling about trifles had gone by. She looked him full in the face, her eyes flashing. She stood as it were on guard, with her sword drawn, a woman of high courage. He could not

doubt that, though he watched her with a fond smile, as if she had been a pretty child playing some childish part.

"*Va pour le dîner à deux*, if it must be," she said, throwing off her long white satin cloak, fringed from collar to hem with ostrich plumage.

Her gown was softest chiffon, gauze, lace; an artistic mingling of delicatest fabrics, white as snow, with no gaudy glitter of gold or spangles, no suggestion of tawdriness. The only touch of colour was the ruby necklace which showed blood-red against the marble whiteness of her neck, and the ruby brooches on her corsage. Never had she looked lovelier, in spite of the thirty-five years recorded against her by Debrett.

She was conscious of her beauty and her splendour; eyes and complexion as incomparable as her jewels, a queen in stature, a figure built for grace and dignity. For this hour she felt mistress of the situation; and she treated St. Just with a certain hauteur even in the midst of their confidential talk. She was full of gaiety; ridiculed her friends, talked of private and public people, and would suffer no lapse into sentiment. Nothing could be more correct than her attitude through that hour in the rose-scented room, and on the balcony, where they took their coffee, looking out over the moonlit river, or to the brazen-faced clock, and the beacon light shining above the great grey palace where the everlasting problem of "how not to do it" was in process of solution.

No word that could offend matronly modesty was spoken during that *tête-à-tête* dinner, nor in the carriage as it rolled swiftly through the lighted streets, and along the suburban road, spinning on noiseless wheels past omnibus and van, waggon and cab. But later, when they two were sitting in the shadow, lulled by the ripple of the stream, words were spoken, such fatal and pernicious words as have been breathed into the ear of woman from the dim beginning of time, when this world's first woman heard and trembled at the voice of the serpent; always the same words, the same impassioned prayer, the same perfidious promise of a life of bliss, the same reckless vow of unalterable love.

Mary Selby listened—silent, unreproving, yet unyielding. No, not for worlds would she be false to her husband.

Not for worlds would she suffer the lot of divorced wives, and women who have lost caste. She would dismiss St. Just out of her life to-morrow. She would never of her own free will see his face after to-night.

But this night, while the moon shone, and the river flowed, —that delicious river whose suburban shores needed only the veil of shadow and the fitful purple light to make them lovely—what did it matter if wild words were spoken, and if she listened, without too harsh a protest against the guilt of it all?

"What midsummer madness this is, St. Just. You know that I am not the kind of woman to endure disgrace," she said, in a low voice, trying to speak lightly, with her head turned from him, while she watched the shore that seemed gliding away as she looked at it, gliding from her sight into the unknown darkness, and carrying her past existence with it.

All her married life, the gaudy pleasures—the luxury of money-spending, of caprices gratified on the instant, the villa at Cannes, the boat on the Nile, the cottage at Newmarket, the ceaseless round of banal pleasures—faded from her memory, like the vague shapes in a half-forgotten dream. Family, husband, caste, the world—all had become as nothing. Life was narrowed to a point; and time meant only these moments while she sat in shadow, with a hand holding hers, and a lowered voice breathing the seducer's impassioned prayer.

He wanted her to go back to London with him. He could get a carriage at Richmond. His yacht was at Greenhithe, fitted and manned for a long cruise. He had made all things ready for the voyage which was to carry them to an Eden of their own. Or they would be ocean wanderers, if she so willed it, remote from the common earth, flitting from one delicious spot to another, as her caprice dictated. Disgrace, the shame of looking into familiar faces and seeing estrangement there, need never come near her. They would live in a world of their own—emancipated spirits, roving far and ever farther from all that was petty and dry-as-dust in everyday life. She let him rave. The low deep tones of the perfect voice lulled her like the distant music of Schubert's serenade, the languid sweetness of the

violins, singing the melody, the organ notes of the 'cello accompanying, like the ground-swell of a summer sea.

She let him rave. What did it matter? To-night she was in fairyland, like the lady in *Comus;* there was no reality in this sense of peril. To-morrow, if there were no notice of Selby's immediate return, she would start by the night mail for Liége. She would swoop down upon the good honest husband, and give him a delightful surprise; as she had done more than once in the past, when she had wearied of London and liberty. She really liked the good man better than any of her friends. He was her best "pal," after all; and if art and literature were outside his comprehension, and his pass-book was the only volume he ever opened, he read the newspapers diligently, and could always talk about things. And then he admired her with a quiet dog-like worship which was more flattering than all the airy nothings of "haw-haw" guardsmen and society poets, the men who gave themselves airs upon the strength of "a rivulet of print meandering through a meadow of margin." Selby was at least better than any of these.

A blaze of light in the distance awoke a chorus of exclamations. The boats had passed under Richmond Bridge, where Mrs. Stormont's boat shot past the others and went to the front. They had passed Buccleuch House, with its river-kissed lawn, and the big hotel crowning the wooded hill. They were in a lonely reach of the river, no one knew exactly where, no one cared to know; and there in front of them they beheld a fairy palace, chains of coloured lights hanging all along the shore, a landing-stage with the same rainbow brightness of hanging lamps, and a lawn surrounded by a lamplit arcade, while in the background a vast marquee aped the form and substance of an Oriental palace, every line, domes and minarets, doors and windows, edged with rainbow light from electric globes that shone like the jewels in Aladdin's cave. And from this fairy palace there came more music, this time the unmistakable music of a military band, playing the gavotte from the *Gondoliers*, so gay, so light, so sparkling, carrying a sense of unreasoning joy even to jaded hearts. Praises were loud and enthusiastic as Vanessa stood on the landing-stage to receive her party.

"So glad you like it all," she said gaily. "The idea was mine; but the carrying out is all Sir Frederick Marwood's. I'm not going to be mean and deny it."

Sir Frederick hovered near her, and accepted everybody's compliments; and then, the cool night air having prepared the modern unashamed appetite for something more substantial than the ices and cool drinks served on the boats, the magic word of supper floated in the atmosphere; and there was a rapid and simultaneous movement towards the fairy palace.

"Supper's ready," Vanessa told her friends, adding the hospitable assurance that they need have no fear of the quails or the champagne giving out. "And there's a fine floor for those that hanker after the light fantastic," she said, "and I mean to have a twirl round myself before daylight, if anybody will ask me."

Meanwhile Sir Frederick and Stormont had gone about, telling the men that there would be a special train at Twickenham station, to start punctually at four o'clock, and carriages ready to take people to the station at a quarter to four.

"You can't have carriages enough for everybody," said one of the men.

"We shan't leave a mortal behind, unless he wants to stop. There'll be room for every one in our sixty breaks and landaus."

"Sixty! That's a large order."

"Oh, we didn't want to be in the position of the ancient Nabob, who had to order 'more curricles' for his guests. It might not be easy to raise extra conveyances at four o'clock in the morning."

The grounds were spacious, and thickly wooded; and all beyond that brilliant nucleus of coloured light lay in shadow under the sinking moon, a place in which it was easy for those unfamiliar with the scene by daylight to lose themselves. Only here and there a lamp had been hung on the dark trunk of a tree, to mark a footpath, or the parting of the ways; and this glow-worm glimmer served to intensify the darkness, and gave a mystic air as of an enchanted forest. There were not many wanderers; for the attractions of the supper-tent and the ballroom prevailed over the

romance of the shadowy grounds, or the footpath on the edge of the river. Dancing was going on furiously in the spacious marquee, for a cotillon was in full swing, led by Sir Frederick and Vanessa, both alike possessed with an untiring ardour, and the waltzing power of phantom dancers in a German legend. Rumour had described the presents as unparalleled even among millionaire hostesses; and the moment when a beribboned cart drawn by a snow-white donkey brought these treasures into the ballroom was a thrilling episode in this midsummer night's dream.

Lady Mary was not in the cotillon; but this fact was not surprising, as she rarely danced. A waltz once in a way, with a favourite partner, just to show her dearest friends that she waltzed more exquisitely than the best of them, sufficed her. To be eager for dances, to give her hand freely to the first comer, she considered unbefitting the dignity of her five and thirty years, the royal repose of her manner. To waltz with Lady Mary Selby was an honour which golden youth knew how to appreciate.

She had been seen with St. Just in the supper-tent, but only for a few minutes. She would take nothing but a sandwich, and a glass of champagne in a tumbler of seltzer. Her friends watched her, criticized her gown and her rubies, and noted that she was very pale, save for a hectic flush that came and went upon her cheek. They noted also that St. Just never left her; and, in the shorthand vocabulary of our time, told each other that "M. was giving herself away."

The atmosphere of the tent stifled her; the crowd, the odours of hot soups and coffee and chocolate from the buffet, where lamps were burning under copper heaters—all was oppressive. She was glad to escape into the coolness outside.

"Let us go and watch the cotillon," she said. "It is going to be something tremendous — with all sorts of absurdities."

"No, no; you have seen hundreds of cotillons. Let us watch the dying moon upon the river." He drew her hand through his arm, and led her away from the gaudy light, into an avenue of old trees, tall beeches that were ancient when Horace Walpole was busy with his toy castle in his

beloved "County of Twicks;" when Lady Suffolk was building herself a dower house hard by; when Twickenham and Richmond were secluded villages, the favoured homes of the learned and the *élite*. All was changed since those days; but to-night all seemed unchanged in the glimmer of a sinking moon and the first faint lilac of dawn.

A narrow backwater wound among the trees; it was scarcely more than a ditch, but there was water enough to reflect the fading stars and that faint daffodil glimmer of the coming dawn, through an opening in the leafy roof. It was a place of silence and seclusion, a narrow path following the edge of the water, a low, irregular bank, broken here and there where cattle had trampled the ground, going down to drink. It was a spot for lovers, perhaps, since it was remote and unfrequented, a winding track under leafy shade, where with the first faint promise of dawn there came the low sweet chorus of awakening birds, that sound which of all others suggests the birth of a new day. But it was hardly a spot to charm a solitary straggler; yet here was Mrs. Kelvin, wrapped in a black satin cloak, the hood drawn over her head and covering her face, with just space for gleaming eyes to look out, peering round, piercing the shadows under the trees, glancing this way and that, eager, alert, expectant. So shrouded there was little fear of her being observed by any one else who might be sauntering along the narrow track; but she was particularly careful to avoid the possibility. Stealthy of foot, creeping from tree to tree, not upon the path itself, but on the rank dry grass beside it, moving slowly, so as to avoid the rustling of silken skirts or of the long rank grass, she stole through the shadows, following the stream to the river in the ghostly dawn, a phantom, a ghoul, an evil spirit.

Was it a rendezvous or an espial?

XXVI.

Walter Arden was destined to suffer a rude awakening from the halcyon days of tranquillity and content which had followed his reunion with his wife. He had been supremely happy, and had almost forgotten the sufferings of the past. He had knelt in the little Lutheran church with Rachel, and had heard the message of peace, not as the believer hears, but touched by the wisdom of the Divine words, the beauty of the Divine life, sympathizing with his wife in her implicit faith, her unquestioning acceptance of the miraculous element in a life which to him had never been more than a tradition and an example.

He was happy, and his mind was at rest; and in his musings on this happy change he recalled one of the strange features of Chaldean magic; the belief that the soul which had been held in bondage by an evil spirit could, after the expulsion of the demon, only be made secure from future harm by becoming the tabernacle of a good spirit. Possession could only be cured by possession. The counter influence was needed for safety.

"Rachel is my good spirit," he thought. "The mind that gentle spirit rules ought to be invincible against demoniac power. To live with her, to live for her, shall be my religion; and who knows, some day I may come to think as she thinks, and may learn to trust in the unknown good, as I have learnt to fear the unknown evil."

They had left the mountain village above the Lake of Thun, and had travelled by easy stages, in extra post carriages, stopping at any halting-place that took their fancy, from Thun to the Engadine, where they had spent the first fortnight of July, not at Pontresina, or St. Moritz, or Maloja, but at the smaller hotels in less frequented

places, where there were none of the attractions which the average tourist demands: no tennis tournaments or hotel dances, no band, no amateur theatricals or *tableaux vivants*. They spent some days at Samaden, taking long walks in the neighbourhood, perfectly happy in each other's company; and from Samaden they made a leisurely journey to Damezzo, a village near the Italian frontier, a valley embowered in chestnut woods, and with a narrow river rushing between steep banks crowned with sedges, through meadows sprinkled with purple crocuses, and merry with the fairy music of innumerable grasshoppers.

Here Arden meant to make a halt till September, when he wanted to take Rachel to that Italian lake-land which she had never seen, and where he had been a lonely and miserable wanderer in the unhappy time before he met her. To be in those lovely scenes with her, to be able to take pleasure in their romantic beauty, and to be soothed by their tranquil atmosphere, would be ineffable bliss.

The hotel at Damezzo was of modest proportions, and there were few visitors at this time, while the season was still too warm for going on to Italy. They had a suite of rooms looking towards the river, with a wide view of distant hills, and in the foreground a picturesque one-arched bridge that spanned a waterfall. They had a garden, and a spacious summer-house trellised with roses, where they read and wrote and rested through the heat of the day, and where they took their breakfast and tea; and for their morning and evening rambles they had mountain roads, through immeasurable chestnut woods, roads leading up to white-walled villages that seemed hanging in the sky.

It was from this haven of rest that Arden was called away by news that came upon him like a thunderclap.

He opened a London daily paper, sitting among the roses in the golden evening light, in an atmosphere of supreme peace, silent, save for the rush of the waterfall and the thin shrill chorus of the grasshoppers in the meadows below. He was alone, his wife having gone upon a mission of charity to a bedridden old woman in a lonely homestead, where the peasant farmer and his kine lived in friendly propinquity. He was alone when the thunderbolt fell.

"Murder of Lady Mary Selby.

"Society has experienced a terrible shock in the tragic fate of a lady who was eminently popular in a wide circle, and whose beauty and talent made her a conspicuous figure among the many lovely and clever women of the day. As a hostess, Lady Mary Selby was incomparable. She had made her house a focus for beauty, wit, and art, which recalled the choicer gatherings in the houses of Lady Waldegrave and Lady Molesworth. Gifted with singular tact, and with a charm of manner that was more potent even than her commanding beauty, Lady Mary was a centre of attraction in every circle; and, being endowed with a fine physique and inexhaustible vivacity, she took a leading position in all fashionable gaieties, whether in the London season, in Egypt, or on the Riviera. Happily married to a man of vast wealth, her fine and original taste never suffered restraint for lack of means; and society was to be congratulated upon the union of so much charm and talent with such ample fortune. With Lady Mary the power to achieve went along with the genius that could invent; and the world of fashion was on tip-toe at the beginning of a London season, to discover what new and striking form of entertainment would be given at her palatial house in Grosvenor Square.

"The hand of an undiscovered assassin has cut short that brilliant career, and Mr. Selby, Lady Mary's brother, Lord Wildernsea, and a large circle of relations and friends, are mourning for the unhappy fate of an amiable and gifted woman, while the police are endeavouring to solve the mystery of her cruel death. A detailed description of the brilliant *fête* given by a Chicago belle and millionaire, at which Lady Mary Selby was a prominent figure, appeared in our issue of Wednesday; and a report of the coroner's inquest upon the unhappy lady will be found in another part of this paper."

Arden's eye had rushed over the prolix article, transfixed by the hideous fact embodied in the journalist's florid paragraphs. Death! Murder! The two most horrible words in the language—the second infinitely more terrible

than the first. He turned the paper with trembling hands, looking for the report of the inquest. It occupied two columns of closely printed matter; and the name of one of the witnesses deepened the horror in Arden's mind as he read the ghastly details.

The first witness to be examined was a boatman, who discovered the body of the murdered woman in the back-water in the grounds of Montpelier House, Twickenham. His attention had been attracted by the appearance of some white object lying in the narrow inlet at a little distance from the river-bank, too far off for him to see what it was as he rowed past, but near enough to excite his curiosity, and induce him to pull his boat ashore and go to the spot, where he found the body of a lady dressed in white, lying in about a foot of water. She wore a white cloak trimmed with feathers. She had no necklace, but there were jewels on the bosom of her gown. Seeing that there was no doubt as to her being dead, he had gone at once in search of a policeman. The time when he made this discovery was between six and seven o'clock on the morning of Wednesday.

The evidence of the police constable followed. He described the appearance of the corpse, and the marks upon the throat, which clearly pointed to strangulation. Death by drowning under the conditions would have been impossible, unless any one had fallen face downward into the water, or had fallen there in a fainting state and so been suffocated. The lady's face was hardly covered by the water.

Dr. Stedman, a local medical man, confirmed the constable's view. He declared that the signs of strangulation were unmistakable. The throat, which was cruelly bruised, showed the grip of a powerful hand, the finger-marks being clearly defined. When asked if he could form any opinion as to the character of the hand that had made this imprint, he replied that he did not think it was the hand of a man employed in rough labour. The distinct lines of the bruises gave the shape of the fingers, and indicated a long slender hand, rather than a broad and coarse one. Asked if he believed there had been a struggle, the doctor replied yes: that the hair of the deceased was dishevelled, her left arm showed the imprint of a hand that had grasped it

violently, and her dress, which was of a very delicate fabric, was a good deal torn. He had gone over the ground with the constable. There was a spot some ten or twelve yards from the water, where the grass was trampled, and where they discovered the marks of a lady's high-heeled shoes. He believed that the murder had occurred at this spot; and that the body had been carried from there to the ditch where it was found. In reply to the coroner's question, he said that there were no indications of the body having been dragged over the grass. The murderer must have been a powerful man, the deceased lady being considerably above the common height.

The coroner reminded the witness that he had described the marks upon the throat as indicating a delicate rather than a powerful hand.

"I said they were the marks of slender fingers," answered the doctor; "but there is a sinewy nervous strength which is no less powerful than weight and bulk. The grip upon the throat of the deceased must have been the grip of a hand with muscles of steel."

Mrs. Stormont, who was painfully agitated, gave evidence as to the last time she had seen Lady Mary Selby on the evening of her *fête*. It was in the supper-tent, where the deceased was standing near the buffet, talking to Lord St. Just. They were only taking some light refreshment, and she did not see them sit down at one of the little tables, which were mostly crowded at this time. She did not observe them leaving the tent. She was there herself only a few minutes; as she had her duties as hostess in the marquee where the dancing was going on. She looked for Lady Mary at the station before the starting of the train, but was not surprised at failing to discover her, among nearly three hundred people. Lord St. Just helped her in her search on the platform, and in the waiting-rooms. He had lost sight of Lady Mary some time before the carriages left for the station.

St. Just, who had volunteered his evidence, stated that he and Lady Mary had walked round the grounds together; and that at her request he had taken her back to the marquee, where she left him to look at the end of the cotillon. He did not go into the marquee, and afterwards,

when the prizes had been distributed, there was considerable confusion; as there was very little time left for the drive to the station, and people were rushing to the carriages, and looking for each other in a distracted way.

The coroner asked if St. Just could remember the precise time at which he had seen Lady Mary enter the marquee.

Yes, he had looked at his watch immediately after leaving her. It was five and twenty minutes past three, and the carriages were to leave for the station at a quarter to four. The cotillon must have lasted nearly twenty minutes after this. He was walking up and down the lawn in front of the marquee, waiting to escort Lady Mary to the station; but in the rush of people, who poured out of the tent *en masse*, after the cotillon, he failed to discover her, and he accompanied Mrs. Stormont to her carriage, and took his seat beside her, when they drove away.

"You felt no uneasiness about the missing lady?"

"No; I had no suspicion that she was missing, although I failed in finding her. I had only time to walk along the line of carriages, into which people were hurrying, afraid of being left behind. Although I could not see Lady Mary, I thought that she must be in one of the crowded vehicles. There was only time for a hasty search. The same thing occurred at the station."

"When you were walking in the grounds with the deceased, did you see any suspicious character lurking about?"

"No; we met no one who did not belong to Mrs. Stormont's party."

"Did you notice what jewels the deceased was wearing?"

"Nobody could fail to notice Lady Mary's ruby necklace, and the jewels on her corsage."

"Were these jewels exposed to view while she was walking with you?"

"She was wearing a cloak all the time; but the night was sultry, and she had thrown her cloak open at the throat, so that her necklace might have been seen by any one who passed us."

"Did you meet many of Mrs. Stormont's guests?"

"An occasional couple only, sauntering under the trees, as we were."

"Did your walk extend to the spot where the body was found?"

"No; we walked in that direction, but not so far. I never saw the place till this morning, when I went to look at it with the police."

"Can you account for Lady Mary Selby having gone back to that lonely part of the grounds, after she left the dancing-tent?"

"I imagine that she may have loitered at the last, and then may have become confused and agitated on finding herself left behind, and so may have taken a wrong turn."

"That would seem unlikely, while a crowd of people were all hurrying in one direction," said the coroner.

"The crowd was not all going in one direction. Ladies were running about confusedly, asking the way to the gate where the carriages were waiting."

"But it was broad daylight at four o'clock."

"It was daylight; but there was a good deal of confusion notwithstanding."

"There must be some one who saw the deceased in the dancing-tent, if she stayed there twenty minutes," said the coroner.

"No doubt she must have been seen by a good many people."

No further questions were asked of Lord St. Just. Lady Mary's French maid was the next witness, who had been brought there only to state what jewels her mistress was wearing on the evening of Mrs. Stormont's *fête*. She described the ruby and diamond necklace, which she had been told had cost thirteen thousand pounds, and a number of ruby and diamond brooches, also of considerable value.

The inquest was adjourned, to give time for further evidence to be obtained.

XXVII.

Arden arrived in London two days after the inquest at Twickenham, and went straight to his brother's house in Hertford Street, where he found Lord Wildernsea and his wife and daughters in a state of unspeakable consternation. The elder of the two girls had made her *début* this season, and had still a goodly number of balls and parties on her list. The society papers had enthroned her among the beauties; and her mother expected her to make a great marriage. Perhaps the aspect in which Lady Mary's dreadful fate most strikingly presented itself to the Wildernsea household was as a thing that ought not to have occurred in a respectable family; a sensational kind of calamity that people would never leave off talking about; and which would prove a hotbed for scandalous details, for imputations and insinuations running underground in endless ramifications, like a pernicious weed under a grass lawn, spreading over the whole of the unhappy lady's married life.

"I knew how reckless Mary was, and how very near the wind she sailed sometimes," Wildernsea said to his brother, after the first few words of unalloyed grief had been spoken, "but I never thought such a horror as this would come upon her."

"I hope you don't think my poor sister was to blame for being murdered—that this hideous tragedy was her fault," Arden said indignantly.

"Her fault, poor soul! No, no, of course not! Still, don't you know, if she hadn't gone to that odious party—a flashy, vulgar American thing—my wife had a card, and the girl wanted to go, but I wouldn't hear of it—if Mary had kept herself aloof, as she ought to have done, she would have been alive and happy. I never saw her looking handsomer than two or three nights before, at the opera.

And to go to a nobody's party, in a mob of silly people, roaming about a strange place in the dead of the night! What could come of it but harm? That poor devil Selby is broken-hearted. I never saw a fellow so crushed. And as for myself, I shan't enter one of my clubs this season. I can't stand being pitied, and stared at, and whispered about. Notoriety of any kind is poison to me—and such notoriety as this is more than I can stand. I don't believe there has been anything as horrible since Lord Ferrers was hanged for shooting his steward."

The younger brother looked at him with unmitigated scorn. Her ways were not his ways, but Walter Arden had loved his sister; and it enraged him to hear her miserable fate considered from the society point of view. Wildernsea was walking about the room in a distracted way, unconscious of that contemptuous glance. He was not altogether heartless; he had given his murdered sister two days and nights of profound grief; but then had come the reaction, and the idea of the catastrophe as it affected his own family. To his mind there was unspeakable disgrace in the tragedy. He had always supposed that murders of this kind were peculiar to the East End slums, the dark places of the great city; or, at any rate, to the lower middle classes. The murder of Lord William Russell by his valet, and an agrarian murder or two in Ireland, were all the crimes of this nature that he could recall among people of importance; and those had been respectable murders, leaving no trail of slander behind them.

"Poor Honoria!" he muttered, as he paced the room. "It is hard lines for her."

"Honoria?" questioned Arden.

"Yes, her first season; and she has been tremendously admired. The young Duke of Lincolnshire has been very marked in his attentions, her mother tells me; waltzed with her no end, and always sitting out together. And now this business will upset everything. I shall take them all to Wildernsea to-morrow. It will spoil Honoria's season; but there's no use staying in town, now we're in deep mourning. I can run up for the day, if I'm wanted."

"Do you know who murdered your sister?" Arden asked suddenly.

"Know? Why, of course not! Nobody knows. But I hope the police will find the wretch. Some miserable tramp, I suppose, who was prowling about the place on the look out for business, and met her alone, blazing with jewels, and strangled her for the sake of the plunder. The police are hunting for him, and hope to trace him through the jewellery. Selby wanted to offer a thousand pounds reward; but the Chief recommended him to keep quiet, and leave everything to the Criminal Investigation Department. Twickenham is within the London radius, so the affair rests with Scotland Yard."

"Is that the theory? A casual member of the criminal classes—who met her alone, and in a solitary part of the grounds? Is that your idea?"

"What else can I think, after St. Just's evidence? She must have taken a wrong turn, when the crowd were hurrying to the gates, and lost her way."

"Is that like Mary? She was not the kind of woman to lose her head, and take a wrong path in broad daylight. Was not! Oh, God, that we must speak of her in the past! I don't believe in your theory. I don't believe that Scotland Yard will find the murderer, starting with the idea that he is a member of the criminal classes, who will try to dispose of the jewels."

"Have you a theory of your own?"

"I have; but I shall keep it locked in my own mind, for the present."

"I don't think anybody's theories can be of much use. We must look to Scotland Yard for the solution of the mystery—if you can call it a mystery, when the motive of the crime was so obvious. Poor Mary! We had drifted apart since her marriage. My wife couldn't stand the kind of people Mary cultivated—actors, and newspaper men, and painters, and such like. But I was very fond of her. The funeral is arranged for to-morrow, at two o'clock, at Kensal Green. But there will be a service at St. Aldate's, her favourite church, at twelve. You will be there, of course?"

"Yes, I shall be there. Good-bye."

Arden went from his brother's house to Grosvenor Square, to the house of death, where the spacious splendour of hall

and staircase was wrapped in gloom; and where the atmosphere was laden with the sickly subtle perfume of gardenias and tube-roses. He found Mr. Selby in the library, a room which had always been devoted to his particular use, where he received business visitors, and where he had elaborated those financial schemes which had built up his fortune. The room was at the back of the house, lighted by one wide window, which commanded only the dead wall of the smoking-room, across a space of ten feet, a gloomy outlook to a room furnished with dark oak, and lined with those time-honoured works which every gentleman's library should contain, and which very few gentlemen who buy a library *en bloc* are in the habit of reading.

No need to draw the blinds down here. The window was wide open, and in the sunless light Selby sat staring at the opposite wall, haggard, livid, with eyes that had shed passionate tears, in the night silence, and were dim, and pale, and tired, and hopeless, beyond all eyes that Arden had ever looked upon. The daily papers were on the table, folded as the servant had placed them. The lid of the massive silver inkstand had not been lifted. All the usual signs of occupation were absent. The man was sitting there, motionless, listless, inert, a mechanism whose springs were broken.

On the table in front of him, Arden noticed an open sandal-wood box, the contents covered with jewellers' wool. He did not rise to receive his brother-in-law, or give any indication of surprise at his appearance. He held out his hand without a word, and it was deadly cold in Arden's grasp.

"I am profoundly sorry for you, Selby. There are troubles too dreadful to be expressed in words—and this is one."

"I loved her, Arden. God knows how dearly. I had nothing else in the world. You've heard how I began life—an office-boy, motherless, with a drunken father, kicked out-of-doors before I was thirteen, to sink or swim. I had never loved anybody till I met Mary. I had nothing but her—her and money; and I only cared for money because she liked to spend it. There is nothing left, now she is gone."

Arden seated himself in silence. Yes, this was a pure

and perfect love. He had always respected Selby for his straightforward, purposeful life, for his unwavering affection for the woman he had chosen for his helpmeet, his willingness to take the lower place, to submit his own inclinations to his wife's pleasure.

Selby sat silent, with his hand shading his eyes, for a few minutes, while the ticking of the tall eight-day clock seemed to grow more insistent with every moment it checked off; and Arden found himself looking automatically at the long rows of books in their rich and sober bindings of dull red and dark brown, olive and black—Gibbon, Hume, Grote, Froude, Macaulay, Dickens. Their names meant nothing to him in this hour of agonizing thoughts; but he looked at them all the same.

"She was brought home last night," Selby said, in a low voice, "and the coffin was nailed down this morning. They were in a hurry to hide her face—her beautiful face—the only face I loved. You don't know what desolation means, Arden. No man can know, who hasn't lost all—as I have. My life is broken off short. If I live to be eighty, there will be no meaning in my existence. It will be just dragging on a load of misery, like a galley-slave toiling in irons. I hope I shall die before the year is out."

"Time brings consolations," Arden said gently. "Your wealth is a great power. You will find a beneficent use for it."

"Build a hospital in memory of my wife? God knows I wouldn't stint the cost; but that's soon done. And after——"

"Time will bring you something else; some new tie, perhaps, in the far-off years."

"Another wife, do you mean? A strange woman to take Mary's place. No, no, no; no strange woman shall ever take her place or name. If I were fool enough, in some weak moment, to think I cared for another woman; and were to marry her and bring her home to this house, I should hate her. I should hate her all the days of my life, and hate myself for having thought I could care for her. No, Arden, my life, as a man, is finished. I may go on, perhaps, as a money-making machine; but for the rest, Amen."

There was a silence, and Arden saw slow tears stealing down the haggard face, under the shading hand, and then the low dull voice went on—

"She is lying in her own room, the large front room on the second floor. The view from the windows used to look green and countryfied in summer-time. She made her rooms so beautiful. She had such perfect taste. Every piece of furniture, the colouring of the walls, the draperies, everything, was her own choice. The upholsterers and people said that her taste was faultless. She never made a mistake."

He had said no word as to the manner of her death. Arden wondered at this. There was a touch of egotism, perhaps, here. It seemed as if the one thought in his mind was of his own loss—the beautiful thing that had been his, and that Fate had snatched from him.

"Have there been no discoveries?" Arden asked at last, "no clue to the murderer?"

"Discoveries? Yes; there is this," Selby answered, with his hand on the sandal-wood box. "It came this morning, addressed to me. Her necklace—the only necklace she wore that night."

"The necklace which was supposed to have tempted the murderer! I knew, I knew, that it was no common criminal who killed her. Who sent it to you? Where did it come from?"

"I don't know. The parcel was insured and posted at Charing Cross. There was no name—no word in the box; nothing but her necklace—her favourite necklace. God! what a happy man I was the day I clasped it round her neck. It was the anniversary of our wedding. I had pulled off something rather big in Russia; and I wanted to give her the best that money could buy. And all last night I was walking about this room like a madman, thinking that my gift had been the cause of her death."

Arden took the box from his hand, and examined it carefully. The address was written in a stiff upright hand, like a schoolboy's—a feigned hand, no doubt; but every stroke was broad and strong. There were no signs of weakness.

Was it the murderer who had sent the necklace? No;

he could not believe that. If the crime had been done for plunder, the necklace would have been broken up within an hour, and the loose stones disposed of before the murder was known. There were dealers in London who would not ask too many questions, and who had a ready market for gems of exceptional value. The rubies would have been sent out of the country before the transaction could be investigated. No; the return of the jewels was not the act of a panic-stricken thief, afraid to hold the booty for which he had stained his soul with blood. If the murderer was the man Arden thought, nothing seemed less likely than that he should restore the necklace, nothing less likely than that he should have taken it from his victim's neck.

He went up to the chamber of death with Selby, and looked at the coffin, heaped with white flowers, wreaths and crosses, hearts and lyres; the tribute of many of those trivial friends who in their trivial way had loved the dead woman for her graciousness, for her hospitality, for her liberal view of other women's false steps and escapades, for her readiness to interest herself in other people's loves and sorrows. She was *simpatica*. Every one had repeated the phrase. Poor Mary was *simpatica;* and her house was delightful. So the wreaths of white lilies and Niphetos roses were not such empty tributes to state and position as they sometimes are.

The room was lovely—white walls, white curtains, white bed, all the furniture of white enamelled wood, only relieved by the pale pink roses on the chintz and the pale green of the carpet sprinkled with rosebuds. A few choice Bartolozzi rustic subjects in oval frames, a stand of delicately bound books, were the only ornaments. A spacious simplicity was the dominant note. Arden marked every detail, as he stood beside the coffin, with the same automatic observation that he had given to the books in the room below.

Selby looked at the room with admiring tenderness. His own bedchamber was on the same floor, furnished with a Spartan severity. This room had always been to him as a temple, sacred and beloved.

"My Mary—my beautiful Mary!" he sobbed, with clasped hands pressed upon the coffin, heedless of the havoc those heavy hands made among the fragile blossoms.

A shower of white petals rained upon the carpet. He fell on his knees, and laid his haggard face against the side of the coffin.

"Good-bye, Arden," he said; "don't wait for me. You can find your way downstairs, like a good fellow. I shall stay here a little longer. God help me! It is our last day together."

"I shall come to you to-morrow, in the afternoon," said Arden, gently.

"Yes, to-morrow—after the funeral. Come back to this desolate house with me, and see how empty it is without her."

Arden left him on his knees, among the shattered flowers, with his head bowed, and his tears hidden behind the strong hands. There had been nothing said of the manner of his wife's death—no speculations about the murderer. The one paramount fact that she was gone from him absorbed all the thinking power in Selby's mind.

Arden's next visit was to Portland Place. Though he shrank with horror from an encounter with St. Just, the time had come when he must see this man face to face, must try to penetrate the mystery of his existence, find the devil under the mask of humanity.

He was baffled at the outset. Lord St. Just had left London that morning, the servant told him. Questioned closely, the man gave scanty information. He believed that his lordship had gone to Paris, but could not say whether he was going beyond Paris, or how long he was to be away from London. He had taken no one but his Hungarian valet with him. The butler did not know at what hotel his lordship stayed in Paris. He was a new servant, and had no knowledge of his master's habits.

Arden left Portland Place, doubtful as to his next step. His most urgent desire was to return to Rachel immediately after the funeral. He had hated leaving her far away, and among strangers; and though no place could seem safer than that quiet valley amidst the chestnut woods, and though she had two trustworthy servants to protect her, he was not the less uneasy at being separated from her. Otherwise, his course would have been to go straight to Paris, with the detective he had employed in the past, to follow the

movements of St. Just. But whatever his duty to the dead, his duty to the living was paramount. He meant to start for Damezzo by the night train for Basle, on the following evening.

On returning to Guelph Place, he was told that a lady had called during his absence. She had not given the servant her name, but she had inquired when his master was likely to be at home, and had left a note, and would call again at three o'clock.

The note was from Mrs. Kelvin.

I write this in case you should be out when I call, in which case I shall return later. Pray do not refuse to see me, dear Mr. Arden. I have something of dire importance to tell you, something which comes nearer you and yours than it does to me.

Yours in great distress of mind,

ISABEL KELVIN.

Mrs. Kelvin? Yes, he remembered meeting her at his sister's house. She was one of Mary's friends, a woman of whom he had never approved as his sister's intimate companion; an embodiment of all that is shallow, and frivolous, and unprincipled, in the world of pleasure; a woman who lived only to dress expensively and be admired, and gad from party to party, and talk slightingly of everybody she knew; a beautiful viper, he thought, a creature without soul or conscience, always ready to bite the hand that fed it. She had something to tell him—something terrible—something about his murdered sister. He shuddered at the thought of a revelation from those malicious lips, remembering the cynical airy phrases which had blown away a friend's character, to spice an after-luncheon cigarette. But he could not refuse to hear what she had to tell him. "Something of dire importance."

He walked up and down his library, the only room that he had allowed to be opened, waiting for his visitor, with a heavy heart, and a mind distraught by shapeless morbid fancies, the old trouble coming back upon him, too disturbed to open one of the books piled on the tables, the surplus volumes for which there was no shelf-room, and which were

stacked on every available piece of furniture, the accumulations of the last year.

A telegram from Rachel, delivered an hour before, told him that all was well with her. She had promised to telegraph to him every morning, and to write to him every day. He would thus be kept in touch with her during his enforced absence, which he measured anxiously by moments. Since he had heard of St. Just's departure for the Continent, it seemed to him as if the devil were at large, a foul fiend, whose existence menaced Rachel.

She would think of him as the man by whose sick-bed she had knelt in prayer and pious meditation. She could never picture him as Arden knew him, the deathless spirit of evil, passing from phase to phase of human life.

Mrs. Kelvin was announced, and he was surprised to see, not the futile being he remembered of old, not the airy, fluttering creature, tricked out in the last caprice of fashionable extravagance, but a woman, an actual woman, pale, emotional, with frightened eyes and a trembling breathlessness, as of a woman near the fainting-point.

"It is very good of you to see me," she faltered, sinking into the chair he drew forward for her. "I have something terrible to tell you—about your sister."

"If it is anything that reflects upon my sister's character, I must beg you to refrain," he said. "I could not consent to believe it; and I should be sorry to express my anger too strongly to a woman."

"No, no; it is nothing against Mary. I should be the last to breathe one word against her. She was my friend. I was very fond of her. We have had many light-hearted hours together—our butterfly pleasures. Oh, it is agonizing to think how that happy life ended. No, no; I have not a thought that wrongs your sister. She was always straight. I want to tell you something horrible—something unbelievable—about her murderer."

"Her murderer! St. Just?"

"What, you know? You *know* that he killed her?"

"I have never doubted it since I read the story of her death."

"How strange! And you could believe it? You could believe anything so horrible of a man who a year ago was

counted the very pattern of the Christian life, a saint on earth? You could believe that such a man could suddenly become a murderer?"

"I had reason to believe as much. But how do you come to know his guilt? Is it an instinct, a guess, on your part?"

"No, no; it is not a guess. I was there—close by. I saw the cruel, cruel murder. I saw my poor friend in the clutch of a human fiend, a maniac—for he must be mad. Nothing but madness could account for such a deed."

"You saw the murder; and you did not give evidence against him! You let the murderer escape! He has left the country; and may never be brought to justice. Where was your love for my sister when you let her murderer escape the gallows?"

"Oh, I know how vile it was in me. But he had been my friend. It would be dreadful to doom him to a murderer's death. And then, for my own sake, I could not bear to come forward and confess that I was there, creeping about among the trees, a listener, a spy. It seemed so contemptible. And I know what lawyers are. I should have been questioned and badgered, and made to commit myself. Why was I there? What was I doing? What was my motive? I should be held up to ridicule and contempt, as a jealous woman, a spy, a listener."

"And, after the inquest, your conscience upbraided you?"

"Yes, I hated myself for having been so cowardly; and I made up my mind that I would come forward at the adjourned inquest, whatever it cost me."

"I'm afraid your repentance has come too late. If St. Just is the man I believe him to be, he will escape all human retribution. And now tell me—tell me every detail of that dreadful night—everything that came within your knowledge."

"That is what I want to do, Mr. Arden. I want to get this load off my mind—this load of misery. I will tell you—everything. I won't spare myself, however you may despise me."

"I shall not despise you. I respect the feeling that has brought you here to-day; and I believe what you tell me—that you really loved my sister."

"Indeed, that is true. She was my favourite friend. She was always kind, always generous. She has helped me often with money when I have been stranded. I was never afraid to go to her in a difficulty. I felt as much at home in her house as in my own. Well, I must begin at the beginning, and must confess that St. Just had an extraordinary influence over my mind. I had always admired him, even when he was a saint, and when people were inclined to laugh at what they called his philanthropic fads; but this summer, after he had broken away from his old life, and had made himself notorious by his dissipated habits, his influence over me became an infatuation. I cannot describe his power over women. Whatever the charm may be, it escapes analysis: but I have seen it as strong upon other women as it was upon me. And I saw your sister yielding to that power in a way that made me tremble for her—even for her, who had been so thoroughly able to hold her own against every danger."

She stopped short, in her hurried and half-breathless speech, sniffed at a bottle of smelling-salts; then, with a burning blush, went on.

"I wanted to marry him, you see. I am always hard up, and I am awfully tired of knocking about the world alone; and though he is not rich, it would have been a decent match for me. I wanted him to care for me, and to offer to marry me. I think he admired me a little, when we met this season. He hung about me at parties, and seemed to like to talk to me. Women have a kind of instinct, don't you know, that tells them they are admired. I thought the rest would follow, and that I should have some one to care for me and pay my debts, and give me an assured position. And then, all at once, I saw that it was hopeless. Your sister had captivated him. He cared for no one else. He devoted himself to her, and followed her about in a way that meant mischief. I think he tried to compromise her, to blight her character, before he asked her to throw everything to the winds for his sake. People began to talk about her infatuation. But, after all, I knew how strong she was; that she could go to the brink of the precipice and not fall over; and so I didn't give up hope. She would lead him on, and then laugh in his face; and

when he was piqued and angry, I thought perhaps my chance might come. I could soothe his wounded vanity. I could let him see that I worshipped him; and so I might snatch the prize. Horrid, isn't it, Mr. Arden? But that's what women come to, when they struggle to keep afloat in an expensive set without the means. I often wish I had the strength of mind to chuck it all, and hide myself in a Buckinghamshire village, and teach in the Sunday school."

"For God's sake, come to the vital point," Arden entreated. "The murder! What did you see or hear that night? What do you know of my sister's death?"

"I saw them leave the supper-tent, and saunter away into the darkness under the trees. I followed them, watching and listening. I wanted to hear how far things had gone—whether Mary would be staunch. I knew she loved him. But which would be stronger—love or pride? I followed them to the edge of the narrow backwater. It was moonlight in places, and then dark under the trees. I followed close enough to hear their talk. They were too much absorbed in each other to hear me creeping near them. He was imploring her to go away with him, to lead a wandering life with him, and laugh the world to scorn; and when she was resolute in her refusal—when she declared again and again that nothing would induce her to disgrace her name and break her husband's heart—he began to be angry. He told her that she had led him on, fooled him to the top of his bent, had treated him as no woman would dare to treat a man if she did not mean to belong to him. He told her that she belonged to him already, by an unspoken concession, by a tacit surrender. There was no one of that night's mob who did not believe her to be his mistress; and to prate to him of her good name, and her husband's honour, after she had listened to him as she had listened to-night, after she had let him read the secret of her heart, was childish folly. And then, as she answered him indignantly, he grew even more insulting; he grasped her arm violently—they were standing in an opening of the trees with the moonlight on them—and he told her that she was his by their mutual love, and that he would not give her up. She should not leave that place alive, if she

did not promise to belong to him, from that hour, in spite of the world."

Again she paused, breathless, her eyes dilated as memory set the scene before her, so recent, so vivid in its reality.

Arden was pacing the room, speechless, his clenched hands before his eyes, dry and burning, and in an agony of rage too fierce for tears.

"She was frightened when he seized her arm; she broke away from him with a scream, and rushed through the trees, past where I was hiding. I was going to her, forgetful of myself, only wanting to help her; but he was too quick for me. He rushed after her, and caught her in his arms. I saw his face in the moonlight—the face of a fiend, murderous, diabolical. His left arm was round her waist, and I saw him throw the beautiful frightened face, the beautiful head and neck, back across his arm, while his right hand grasped her throat. I heard her choking cry, the horrible death-agony; and then I saw him lift her on his shoulder, and carry her towards the backwater. I was paralyzed with horror, and I fell on the ground under the trees, not fainting, but utterly helpless. I could not move. I don't know how long it was, but it was daylight when I crept away. I don't know how he left the place. I never saw him after that moment till an hour after, when he was among the crowd at the station—talking, laughing, with Mrs. Stormont."

"Did you go back to the water to look at his victim?"

"No; I was afraid. I dared not see her face again—the face I had seen in her death-agony—the wild eyes, the writhing lips. I did not know where he had taken her. I dared not go to look for her. I felt powerless to do anything, except creep back to the other people and get home, anyhow. I had to pass over the spot where he killed her—the hateful spot—an open space between two great beeches, and as I went stumbling along, my foot struck against something; and I looked down and saw Mary's ruby necklace lying in the trampled grass."

"Then it was you who sent it to Selby?"

"Yes; it was I. I wanted him to know that the murderer was no common thief. I picked up the necklace, and put

it round my neck, under my cloak; and then I ran to the gates, losing my way ever so many times in my confusion. I was half demented, and hardly knew where I was going, or even who I was. I caught myself wondering about the place, and the time, and the meaning of everything. I must have looked like a madwoman; but nobody noticed me in the *sauve qui peut* at the gates; and I got into a brake with a crowd of chattering girls, who sat on each other's laps, and talked of the cotillon, and I scrambled into a saloon carriage with them, and sat in a corner, and pretended to be asleep, and so got to Vauxhall, where my brougham was waiting for me."

"Well, you must appear at the adjourned inquest, and describe the murder as you saw it. No one will ask you how you came to be at that spot. You have only to relate what you saw and heard, and can swear to. But you must not wait for the inquest. You must come with me at once to Scotland Yard, and make your deposition to the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, so that their machinery for the pursuit of an absconding felon may be put in motion."

He rang the bell, and gave his order.

"A hansom at the door immediately."

The shrill whistle rang through Guelph Place, and was heard in St. James's Street. Mrs. Kelvin offered no objection.

"It is a horrible thing to have to do," she said, "but it is for Mary's sake."

They were not more than half an hour in the Chief's spacious room, where the narration of St. Just's crime was received with a business-like air by an imperturbable official. A murder, more or less, could not agitate the mind that had to carry the burden of metropolitan crime within a radius of fifteen miles from his office. The Chief was, as it were, a Mezzofanti, or a Bunsen, in the criminal tongues. He had the grammar of every species of criminality at his finger's end. He was grave, and profoundly attentive, taking rapid notes of every particular; but he was not astonished. That Lord St. Just should have done this murder seemed to strike him as no more curious than if a shoeless tramp off the high-road had been accused of the crime.

"It looks like a case of homicidal mania," he said; and that was his only comment.

He had watched Mrs. Kelvin closely as she told her story, which she made brief and direct on this occasion, nerving herself to the effort. He wanted to make sure that it was not a case of hysteria, the fabrication of a neurotic brain.

From Scotland Yard Arden went to Grosvenor Square, after having taken Mrs. Kelvin to her house in Half Moon Street. She was worn out by the emotions of the last two hours, and sat silent and speechless in the hansom as they drove through the crowded streets between Whitehall and Mayfair.

The house was small, a façade, two windows broad, with pink geraniums from basement to garrets, and a white door. It was a house like a *bonbonnière*, that gave an impression of charm and prettiness, which the visitor carried in with him, and transferred to his hostess. There was no discordant note in the gamut of beauty, between the pavement outside and the perfectly dressed woman sitting by an artistic hearth.

To-day Mrs. Kelvin was out of tune with this futile prettiness, and did not look as if she belonged to the house. Indeed, she stared about her vaguely when the hansom stopped, and Arden alighted to hand her out, as if she hardly knew that she lived there.

"I thank you for having carried this thing through," he said, as he parted with her. "Be assured that there was nothing else to be done."

"And my evidence will hang St. Just," she said, looking at him with agonized eyes. "If you knew how I admired him—what dreams I have had about him!"

"But they were deluding dreams. You know now that the man is a monster. You will forget him, I hope, when all is over. And as for his fate, I think you need have little fear. I don't believe his crime will ever be brought to justice."

The door had been opened, and they were speaking in lowered accents, while the highly respectable butler waited in the hall.

The hardest part of Arden's work remained to be done.

He had to tell Selby the story of his wife's death, a story in which, however he might soften details and throw a gloss over cruel facts, the adoring husband must needs discover that his wife had dallied with the tempter, had suffered herself to be courted and pursued; only making a stand against the destroyer when her folly had brought about a crisis that meant life or death—at least, the death of character and honour, the ruin of a woman's soul. That in this case it should have meant murder was an abnormal development of a normal situation.

Walter Arden spoke as a man who loved the dead woman, and pitied her devoted husband. If these ghastly details of the tragedy could have been kept from Selby's knowledge, he would have been silent; but for Selby to hear the story at the inquest, from Mrs. Kelvin's lips, unprepared for such a revelation, would be a harder blow.

Arden tried to excuse his sister. Her folly had been the common indiscretion of women of her class. She had allowed a man to pursue her, meaning only to trifle with him, flattered by attentions that had neither value nor significance for her. She had not reckoned with the fierce passions of a profligate—a homicidal maniac, perhaps; for the crime, as witnessed by Mrs. Kelvin, seemed the crime of a madman. She had not understood.

Selby caught at every excuse that spared his idol.

"No, no; she did not understand," he sobbed. "How should she understand her danger? She was accustomed to be admired, to have the best men in London society hanging round her, worshipping her. We used to talk of her conquests. I used to chaff her about her victims. It was a favourite joke with us. She knew what perfect confidence I had in her. I knew her character—such pride; such fearlessness. Women of that stamp never go wrong. How should she reckon with a profligate and a madman, like this devil? Oh, God, that I may see him swing! They must let me see him. I have the right, whatever their law may be. I shall never believe he has paid the penalty, unless I see him fall through the drop."

From Douglas Campbell, Tasmania, to Walter Arden, London.

My dear Arden,

Your last letter interested me profoundly, as indeed all your letters have done, and however beyond the limits of human thought your idea of the entrance of an evil spirit into the tabernacle of a pure departed soul may be, it does not pass beyond my conception of the things that may be. I have never acknowledged that the manifestation of the powers of good and evil ended with the Apostolic age; and that after Peter and Paul had passed from earth there were to be no more miraculous healing of the blind and the lame, no more raising of the dead, no more angelic visitants, before whose coming prison walls fell, and iron fetters were loosened, no more visions, no more opening of the heavens, as they opened before Saul of Tarsus, transforming the pitiless persecutor into the ardent disciple. There are those who see life in its material, and those who see it in its spiritual, aspect. To me nothing is incredible; for I believe in the spirit-world. I walk as one who moves among the unseen. The transmigration of souls is no more wonderful than the communication of thought from the mind of the dead to the mind of the living; and you know that *this* is with me a fixed article of faith. I therefore recognize no impossibility in the lifeless clay of a good man becoming the tenement of an evil spirit. I confess to a deep-seated belief in a universe ruled by conflicting powers, a ceaseless battle between good and evil, a beneficent God, a malignant devil. I know this is not the modern view. We have eliminated incarnate iniquity from our namby-pamby latter-day creed; and by banishing the devil we have made it easier to do without God. Yet in the experience of every man's life there is the sense of an abiding Beneficence, towards which his hands stretch out in the hour of despair, when the deep waters of sorrow are closing over his head; and of an omnipresent power of evil luring him, dragging him into the depths of sin, working against his peace, turning the innocent joys of life to dust and ashes, making the good things that he has loved hateful. I am ready to believe that in your sufferings of the past years you have been the sport of the enemy of man; but on the other hand I am constrained to

consider your state of mind from a common-sense standpoint; and so considered, I see in you the victim of a horrible hallucination, the morbid growth of a highly nervous temperament, and the not unnatural development of thought, in a mind unsustained by the belief in something higher and nobler than itself.

In plain words, my dear Arden, I believe that the materialist, in shutting his mind against the idea of God, is in danger of opening his mind to the idea of Satan. It is the old parable of the empty house and the seven devils. So large a part of man's existence is imagination and thought, that he cannot be satisfied without a belief in the supernatural, the something stronger, or the something better than himself; and if imagination has no dream of heaven, and thought is fettered to the sordid realities of earth, what can the end be but despair? If God is not a necessary fact in the universe, the idea of God is a necessary element in the mind of man. I do not despair of you. Dark as your horizon has been, and obstinate as your rejection of the faith in the world beyond, the faith that upheld me in the hour when Death struck my promised bride, and when the light went out of my life for ever, I believe that peace may yet be yours, if you, who have been so ready to believe in the children of darkness, will open your heart and mind to the children of light; that invisible legion of angels who encompass and protect the righteous upon earth. From those ministering spirits to the Omnipotent Ruler of the universe is a natural and easy transition. Years ago, in our heated discussions, you declared yourself an absolute materialist. You scoffed at all things unthinkable or unknowable. A terrible experience has shown you the diabolical side of the unknowable. God grant that your future experience may show you the divine and the infinitely good.

You will say this is a sermon instead of a letter, but I know you will forgive the preacher.

Yours always,

DOUGLAS CAMPBELL.

Campbell's letter was delivered in Guelph Place on the morning of the funeral, and was hastily read and laid aside for consideration later. The previous evening had brought

Arden a letter from James Walsh, the East End doctor, which he read with eager interest, even at a time when all his thoughts were centred on the tragedy of his sister's death.

Maple Row, Commercial Road,
July 16th, 189–.

DEAR MR. ARDEN,

When we met after my return from Trevelyan, I told you that I meant to send an account of Lord St. Just's case to the *Lancet*. I carried out this intention, and wrote a detailed description of the strange experience, taking care to give no clue to my patient's identity, and therefore withholding my own name from the foot of the letter.

Well, my communication attracted more attention than I had anticipated, and gave rise to a discussion which lasted some time, other examples being cited that bore more or less resemblance to my case; but there was only one of these in which I saw a startling correspondence in the manifestations of the patient's altered nature; and seeing that this account was contributed by a very old doctor, whom I had known as an occasional visitor during my hospital practice, I was induced to call upon him, in the hope of obtaining further details.

Dr. Maldon, who for about forty years was head physician at one of the great city hospitals, has lived the greater part of his life in the heart of commercial London. While almost all his brother practitioners have pitched their tents in Harley Street and Cavendish Square, or places of corresponding gentility, old Dr. Maldon has been content to live in an early Georgian court, buried among banking-houses and mercantile offices, a silent solitude amidst the throbbing pulses of the great city. He is known to be a rich man—rich enough to gratify his taste in a West End house, and a country seat, if he so willed; but he has the adhesive temperament, the love of old things long used and familiar; and I could see by the way he walked round his sombre panelled sitting-room, with its ponderous early Victorian furniture, its cockatoo cage, and wicker dog-kennel, where a plethoric fawn-coloured pug lay perdu, that in this city abode of his were garnered all the things he cares for.

I told him who I was, and reminded him of our meetings

in the hospital, when I had been proud to follow him in his round of the wards, and to listen to his words of wisdom, as he stood beside the beds. He remembered me, and was quite ready to talk of the strange case which he had written about, when he found that I was the writer of the first letter.

He said that of course all he was going to tell me would be told in confidence, and he would therefore withhold no particulars. The experience had come upon him as a very young man, when he was assistant to a general practitioner in the Midlands, in a hunting-country. During his principal's absence he was called in to attend a young man, who was lying at the chief hotel in the town, after a bad accident in the hunting-field. His horse had turned a somersault over a stiff timber fence; and the rider had been pitched upon his head. It was a bad case of concussion of the brain, with other injuries. Valet and grooms were in despair. Their master was the best and kindest of men. If he had been their own flesh and blood they could not have been fonder of him. There were friends of the young man staying at the hotel, who gave him as good a character, and showed the keenest interest in his welfare.

It was a very bad case, and the patient went very near the gates of death. The hunting-season was over before he began to recover, and the convalescence was very slow; but from the hour of restored consciousness the character of the man, as demonstrated in every word and every act, appeared the very opposite of the character described by his friends and servants. The kind and generous master, the sweet-tempered, unselfish friend, had become a selfish and savage tyrant, subject to paroxysms of blind unreasoning fury that touched the border-line of madness. The valet was an elderly man, and had been servant to his master's father; so the young doctor ventured to question him as to the family history. Had there ever been madness in the family? Yes, the man admitted, there had been a terrible case among his master's remote ancestry, more than a hundred years ago, a case of madness and homicide, the murder of a mad-house doctor, in the days when lunatics were treated with infernal cruelty. This unhappy man, the patient's great-grandfather, had been one

of the early followers of the Wesleys, a fanatic in religion, and notorious in his own county for leading the life of an anchorite, and spending his fortune upon works of charity, his manner of going about among the labouring classes of the district, mostly miners, becoming more and more eccentric, until his eccentricities culminated in unmistakable indications of insanity.

Dr. Maldon never met his patient again after he saw him drive away from the hotel in a post-chaise, with his valet and head groom in attendance, on the first stage of his long cross-country journey to the West of England.

The mention of the West of England startled me. I asked if the man's home was in Cornwall. The reply was more startling, for it told me that the man was our man's grandfather, the ninth Lord St. Just; and his after history was no less tragical than the transformation of the man you and I loved. Dr. Maldon's patient survived his accident only three years, married, became the father of a son and heir, and six months after his boy's birth drowned himself in a lake in the grounds of his Highland shooting-box. Dr. Maldon heard later from a member of the family that there could be no doubt of this Lord St. Just's madness; though the devoted care of his wife, a remarkably clever woman, had kept the secret of his infirmity, at the cost of great suffering to herself.

Now, in Dr. Maldon's view of the case, the strain of madness latent in the St. Just family had reappeared in his patient, as a consequence of a serious injury to the brain. My own view of what I call *our* case corresponds with his view. I believe that during St. Just's illness some subtle change took place in his brain; and that the man whose conduct and instincts so perplexed us was, to all intents and purposes, a madman. I await with profound anxiety the future development of his character, so changed from all I remember of benevolence and noble feeling.

Believe me, with apologies for the length of this letter,

Ever faithfully yours,

RICHARD WALSH.

Madness! Atavism! The strain of insanity in the blood of his race! Could the change in the man he had

known be so plausibly, so reasonably, accounted for? Arden brooded over the doctor's letter during the night journey to Basle, sleepless among slumbering fellow-passengers. The few hours of the summer night seemed intolerably slow, and a long day's journey was to follow before he could reach his young wife in the quiet valley, an hour's drive from Chiavenna.

Lucerne, the St. Gothard, Como, the lake, the railway again; and then extra post to his destination. As he thought of the different stages of his journey it seemed endless. Such a pleasant holiday trip for the mind at ease—a luxurious progress through scenes of surpassing beauty—eating, drinking, reading, talking, while that lovely panorama of mountain and torrent, village and vineyard, river and garden and meadow, slowly unfolds itself, and Switzerland melts into Italy; but for the mind racked with fear, what slow torture!

St. Just was at large, a homicidal madman, relentless, a devil of insane fury. After Mrs. Kelvin's account of the murder, could Arden doubt that the man was mad? A murder so cruel, so motiveless, could have its beginning only in the brain of insanity. St. Just was at large; St. Just who, in his better nature, had been Rachel's secret adorer. The fear that he had gone, not to Paris, as his servant affirmed, but in pursuit of Rachel, filled Arden's mind with unspeakable horror. It was an idle fear, perhaps—one of his morbid imaginings—but it was a fear that made the night and day one long agony.

XXVIII.

The solitary days had passed slowly, but peacefully, for Rachel in the quiet valley, where the glory of the surrounding hills, the deep peace of the chestnut woods, the long level pastures sprinkled with pale purple crocuses, alive with the fairy music of unseen grasshoppers, the river creeping lazily between verdant banks, and reflecting the cloudless blue, the sense of summer in the air, all made for contentment and joy. Rachel was peculiarly sensitive to the influence of natural beauty; and though her mind dwelt much upon the tragedy of Mary Selby's death, she could but feel the Divine gift of life, in a world where there was so much of varied and romantic loveliness. Her reunion with her husband had brought an abiding peace into her life. Sympathy, confidence, the perfect bond between man and wife, had been made good as in the early days of their marriage. She thought of him in his trouble with profound tenderness, and longed for his return, but without anxiety; for post and telegraph had kept them in touch with each other in the few days of their severance; and to-night she was to welcome him back to a place which seemed like home, so deep was the charm of its tranquil beauty, and the sense that she had been happy there.

She had made friends of the children and the women; and was almost as much in sympathy with them as if they had been her old pensioners of East-End London. She had sat in their little gardens, and heard the story of their simple lives, their hard work, and many deprivations—a life as laborious as the life of the London poor, but with less of struggle and uncertainty. The children admired and adored the beautiful stranger, who talked to them in her slow careful Italian, and who took such pains to understand their patois; they hung about her footsteps as she walked by the

river, and brought her flowers, which were really the gifts of love, not the offering of the cadging child greedy for the stranger's pence. Her money gifts were to the house-mothers, or the old women, never to the children, for whom she had cakes and fruit sometimes in the trellised arbour where she spent the hottest hours of the day. She liked to see the bright olive faces, and the dark eyes, peering in at the leafy door, smiling and beaming at her, eager for her notice. She would take the smallest children on her lap, and let them touch her laces, and her hair, with inquisitive little fingers; and as she looked at the dark heads crowding round her chair, she would select the boy whose age came nearest to the years of her son, had he lived. He was never forgotten, never long absent from her mind, and often—very often—present in her dreams. She had dreamt lately that he was given back to her. She had held him in her arms, with a sense of overwhelming joy. The dream haunted her, and was with her in all her solitary hours. Every night on her knees she read the story of the Christ-Child's coming, of the gladness on earth and in heaven; and that Divine Image went with all her thoughts of the child she had lost, and the child she had seen in her dreams.

The hour of her husband's return was approaching. She had postponed dinner till his arrival, though she did not expect him till nearly ten o'clock. It was past nine, and she was walking in the garden, with her young St. Bernard frolicking round her, in the cool evening air. The clock of the neighbouring church had not long struck the first quarter, when she heard traveller wheels on the road from the frontier, and rejoiced wonderingly at this early arrival. She did not pause to question whether the carriage could be bringing her husband. Impulsive in her glad surprise, she ran to the gate to meet the traveller. She stood beside the drive, a few paces from the open gates, an ethereal figure, in her white gown, with bare head. Her dog growled angrily when the carriage stopped, and a man sprang out and stood in front of her with outstretched hands. It was not her husband.

The moonlight flashed upon a pale, resolute face.

"Lord St. Just!" she cried, startled and scared at the unexpected appearance.

The St. Bernard made a whining noise that was almost a howl, and slunk into the shrubbery.

Rachel shrank away from those outstretched hands with a sudden sense of loathing, as if some unclean animal had approached her. And then there flashed upon her all that her husband had said of the change in St. Just's nature, and it seemed, as she looked at him, paralyzed by an inexplicable fear, that this was not the man she had known, the friend she had trusted, the saint by whose bed she had knelt in an hour that had been a sacred memory, even after the peril of death was past; an hour on the threshold of the grave, hallowed by the most solemn rites of the Church she loved.

"You look frightened, Mrs. Arden," he said. "Is it such a very startling thing to see me in Switzerland?"

"I am expecting my husband—I thought he was coming, when I heard your carriage. But he is not really due for another quarter of an hour."

"You are expecting him from England? From Chiavenna?"

"Yes. He was to be at Chiavenna at eight o'clock."

"I travelled by the same train. I am sorry I have some bad news for you," St. Just said slowly, after a few moments' silence.

The measured words and compassionate tone scared her, and instantly suggested calamity.

"There has been an accident. He is hurt—dangerously hurt!" she exclaimed, panic-stricken.

"No, no. Pray be calm. There has been an accident. Not on the railway. He has been hurt, but not dangerously. I have come to take you to him."

"You are very good. I will go this instant. Where is he?"

"At a village a few miles off. He was driving in an open carriage; his horses bolted at the bridge near the frontier, and he was thrown out. He fell against one of those granite posts that guard the road. There are contusions, a broken collar-bone, severe injuries—but nothing dangerous to life. It was a wonderful escape. If he had fallen over the edge of the road, he must have been killed. Will you go to the inn where he is lying? My carriage will take you. I changed horses at the frontier."

"Yes; I will go this instant. It was kind of you to come for me. I had better bring my maid, and Walter's servant. They can be useful."

"No, no; time is too precious. He had not recovered consciousness when I left him; and the doctor thought it important that he should see a familiar face when he comes to himself. Your people can follow."

"Yes, they can follow in another carriage. I will give orders. What is the name of the place?"

"It is the village nearest the Custom House. There is only one inn. There can be no mistake."

"You say he has a doctor with him?"

"Yes, an Italian—an intelligent little man, who seemed quite equal to the occasion."

"And he told you there was no danger?"

"None, that he could foresee, with proper care."

Rachel ran to the house, and to her room, where she summoned her faithful handmaid, and gave the necessary instructions. Valet and maid were to follow, directly a carriage could be got for them. She put on a hat and cloak, and hurried back to the gate where St. Just was waiting for her. He had not entered the house during her brief absence. The driver was in his seat, ready to start.

The carriage was a closed landau, from which it was not easy to see the road in the varying lights and shadows. The moon was waning, that moon which had looked upon the murder of Mary Selby. For some way the road was familiar to Rachel. They crossed the bridge over the torrent, passed two or three white houses, where lights were glowing in the windows, then drove rapidly downhill, to the road along which Rachel passed and repassed in her daily walks. She knew every yard of the way they were going, up to this point, but she saw very little of the passing scene. The glass on her side of the carriage was drawn up, and St. Just's figure hid the open window on his side.

Her whole mind was absorbed in questioning him about her husband—the kind of inn to which he had been taken, the attendance and accommodation, the distance from the scene of the accident, the manner in which he had been carried. Every detail was vital. She had no faith in the

Italian doctor's knowledge or skill. A village doctor! She would telephone from the frontier to St. Moritz, for the English doctor she knew there. They had been driving for half an hour before she began to think of the road on which they were travelling, so keen had been her anxiety about her husband's condition And then suddenly it occurred to her that, although the horses were going at a good pace, they seemed always going uphill.

"Are we on the right road?" she asked, in an agitated voice. "I thought it was all downhill to Chiavenna."

"No; the road varies. There is a stiffish hill on this side of the frontier."

The horses were going slowly now, and they were obviously going uphill. Rachel was bewildered, doubtful, and perplexed; for it seemed to her, on reflection, that they had been travelling upward the whole way, though her troubled mind had failed to note the fact before.

She put down the window hurriedly and looked out. They were in a street of white houses, on the ridge of a hill; an old gateway, a big church, looked ghostly in the wan light of the moon. It might have been a phantom city, a place of dreams. She looked up at the church, with its high tower and cupola, the classic archway.

"Why, this is Locco!" she cried; "the village on the top of the hill. What does it mean, Lord St. Just? Why have you deceived me? Is my husband here?"

"Yes, he is here."

"But why—why so far off the main road. No, no; it can't be true. It is a trick of some kind. Where is he?"

The carriage turned a sharp corner in the narrow street, passed under the archway, and pulled up in an open space in front of a large house, a palace once, now an inn.

A man opened the door as the carriage stopped. Lights were burning in the hall—spacious, gloomy; a place of faded splendours and dense shadows, a low ceiling, with carved cornice and heavy cross-beams. A wide stone staircase, with ponderous balusters of dark Sienna marble, faced the doorway. An elderly chambermaid was in attendance. Travellers were evidently expected, albeit the hour was late.

Rachel questioned the man in Italian.

"The gentleman who had been thrown out of a carriage, was he in that house?"

"The fellow understands nothing but his own patois," said St. Just, hurriedly. "Come, come, Mrs. Arden, don't waste time, now you are here."

She followed him up the shallow marble steps, almost mechanically, the chambermaid going in front, carrying a pair of tall candles in copper candlesticks. The unaccountable repulsion she had felt on St. Just's appearance in the garden was stronger now. In doubt, and in a vague horror, she followed him, not in fear. She who had never shrunk from danger in the East End slums, who had sat in the house of crime, knelt by the bed of the dying convict, knew not fear. But a sense of aversion, an instinctive recoil from the man who had once been her trusted friend, chilled her with a sickening dread. She looked about her with wide eyes, as she followed St. Just up four flights of the broad staircase, to the second floor—the noble floor, as it had once been called—and into a large sitting-room, where the two candles, which the chambermaid placed on a centre table, served only to indicate the gloomy spaciousness, the tapestried walls, tarnished gilding, and sombre colouring.

"Where is my husband?" she cried, hurrying across the room, to a door opposite the one by which they had entered.

She tried the door in front of her, and found it locked; then turned and saw St. Just standing before the entrance door, and heard the key turn as he locked it.

"A thousand miles away; in London, so far as I know," he answered, smiling at her.

"What do you mean? Is it a trick, then? He was right. You are changed—utterly changed. You who were so good, so honourable."

"A man may grow tired of being good, as you call it. Goodness earns such poor wages. All the best things in this world are for the not good; the wicked, perhaps, you would call them; the men who desire gladness, and beauty, and the joy of life."

"Why did you bring me here? Is my husband safe—unhurt? Have you told me nothing but lies?"

"I have spread a net for a glorious bird, that could be

caught no other way. It was a stale device, my love, but the only one that would serve. And you are here, you are my companion, in this lonely mountain inn, empty of people, except the inn servants, who take us for man and wife. My queen, my goddess, you belong to me now, and for ever—this world's paltry for ever. You are mine to the end of this mortal life, my life or yours."

She saw the light in his eyes, the light of madness as she thought. Two spots of hectic red flamed on his hollow cheeks, but his lips were ashen. Nothing but a maddened brain could account for the devilry of his conduct. She braced her nerves to meet the danger.

"Open that door," she said, looking at him with resolute eyes, an indomitable spirit shining out of her pale face, every line rigid, her head held high, a noble fearlessness in her attitude as she confronted him. "Unlock that door, this instant. Do you think I am afraid of you?"

"Afraid? No, no, Rachel. You know your power, the power of your Divine beauty. I am master of the situation; but I am your slave, ready to crawl at your feet, to let you set your foot upon my neck. Hard words from those sweet lips will fall like roses. You cannot treat me so ill that I shall love you less. Do with me what you will; only stay with me, only give me love for love."

In that moment, seeing the fierce passion in his face, her courage failed all at once, and she realized her helplessness, caught in the toils, a bird in the snare of the fowler, a pure woman for the first time face to face with impurity, the passion of the Satyr for the nymph.

She shrank from him with such aversion as she had never felt for human kind. The light in his eyes was devilish; the lurid patches on his cheeks suggested the fires of hell. She had faced madness before to-night, and had not feared; but now she knew that she was facing something worse than madness. She felt as if she were standing amidst the roar of waters, with the rising tide encircling her, great waves leaping up to overwhelm her, and storm-winds shrieking round her, drowning her call for help. She gave one wild cry, looked about her in her desperation, saw that one of the long casement windows was ajar, and moved towards it as St. Just approached her, facing him with widely opened eyes.

He came towards her quietly, with a smile upon his pale lips.

"Your master, my beloved, and yet your slave," he said, holding out his arms, and then stopped suddenly and reeled against a chair, as she rushed to the window, flung it open, and vanished from his sight.

Still leaning over the chair, struggling for breath, he heard the muffled sound of something falling in the garden below, and knew that she had thrown herself from the balcony. He felt a torrent of blood welling up in his throat and choking him, as he staggered to the open window, and on to the light iron balcony, and, looking down through the darkness, he saw the white figure lying in the long grass by the side of a stone fountain, fifteen feet below.

The house was built on the steep slope of the hill, and the garden at the back was not more than fifteen feet below the rooms on the second floor.

He had scarcely strength to drag himself back into the room, and to the bell, and then he sank into one of the mammoth sixteenth-century chairs, and let his head fall back against the tapestried cushion.

Rage, disappointment, humiliation, had been in his mind as he saw his prey escape him; but now there was but one passion left in him, the fierce love of life. He knew that he was dying. This bright red stream which was pouring from his lips was life—life ebbing momently—the life he loved, the life in which he had triumphed over weaker lives, had always felt himself the stronger in every contest of human force. It was going from him: and when again should he taste the joy of living—how win his way back to the earth he loved? The machine was broken.

Some one knocked at the door. He could not open it. Or, if he could, what could mortal aid do for him? The machine was broken. He knew that this was the end.

He heard people trying to open the door, then voices, then some one came to the other door, and tried it, the door he had locked that afternoon when he had engaged the rooms, and made his survey of the bower he had chosen for his caged bird. He had heard of this mountain village from the Italian courier whom he had employed to discover

Arden's whereabouts in Switzerland, and report his movements; a man of many languages, and no prejudices. And from this retreat he meant to convey his captive to Genoa—a willing captive, he hoped—and thence to far-off seas, beyond the reach of social laws, or a husband's revenge; far off to loveliest lands under torrid skies, and that semi-savage life for which he had longed with a fervid desire, while hemmed round with the restraints of modern civilization; the life of the savage and the brute, for whom to exist means to enjoy, whose vision of life knows neither past nor future.

XXIX.

The white walls of Locco were shining in the morning sun, and the church bells were ringing for mass, when Arden alighted in front of the old-world palace that was now an inn. He looked a spectral figure in the vivid light, his haggard face grey with anguish. He had been driving to and fro since ten o'clock on the previous night, when he arrived at Damezzo, where he was received as if he had been a ghost, and was told of the supposed accident, and of his wife's hurried departure for an inn near the frontier, with Lord St. Just. Man and maid had followed half an hour later, by their mistress's order.

Frantic with anxiety, Arden started in pursuit, as soon as fresh horses could be got for him; but it was a wild pursuit, since he had no clue to the way St. Just's carriage had gone. The innkeeper declared it had taken the Chiavenna road; but Arden had met only one carriage, which might have been the one containing his servants. He had not noticed the occupants, as it drove past him in the doubtful light.

He went to the station at Chiavenna, after having made inquiries for newly arrived travellers, at two hotels. There was a train that left after midnight, and he waited till that was gone; since it was possible that St. Just might have tricked a distracted wife into going farther than he had urged her at first. With that story of her husband's danger, he might take her where he chose. In her agitation and distress she might scarcely know where she was being taken. The midnight train left; but there was no sign of the travellers he was watching for. He started on the way back, after changing horses, but it was a slower and longer journey, and he was tortured by the knowledge of his helplessness. What next could he do, and what next, and what next?

His wife was in the power of a murderer; fiend, or madman, he knew not which. A homicidal lunatic, the victim of hereditary mania; or the reincarnation of the wickedest human being he had ever known. Whichever view he chose to take of the man St. Just, the knowledge that his wife was in that man's power was equally appalling.

There were no tidings of his wife at Damezzo. The two servants had come back, after their ineffectual search for the inn near the frontier, where they had been told their master would be found. The false information, and their mistress's hurried departure with St. Just, had awakened suspicion; and the valet had spent the early morning hours going about the neighbourhood, in the hope of getting on the track of the carriage that had spirited away his master's wife. There was the possibility of error rather than villainy; but while the woman inclined to think there had been a mistake in the direction that her mistress had given her, the man believed the worst, and devoted himself with unflagging energy to the search for information.

The people of Damezzo were early risers, whose day began soon after the sun appeared above the edge of the eastern hills, a golden light behind the dark line of fir trees, the white homesteads, and cattle-sheds. From one of this industrious race the valet heard of an empty landau that had been seen returning from Locco at daybreak; and the description of the carriage, with a grey and a brown horse, tallied with that in which the man had seen his mistress leave the hotel. The valet now thought it possible that there had been a mistake on his mistress's part as to the place of the accident; and that his master was lying at Locco.

He went back to the hotel, and met Arden in the hall; so that last possibility of honest dealing on St. Just's part was at an end. He told his master what he had heard; and a quarter of an hour later Arden was on his way to Locco behind another pair of horses.

At the inn at Locco all was confusion and terror. The unknown traveller of yesterday, a great gentleman who had engaged the whole of the noble floor for himself and his lady, was quite dead; and the lady, the beautiful young wife, was lying unconscious, and in peril of death, having

fallen, the good God alone knew wherefore, from the balcony of the saloon.

"By the merciful interposition of our blessed Lady, the fall had not been fatal," the innkeeper said piously. "The sweet young English lady was still living."

"Was the signor a relation—perhaps the honourable lady's brother?" suggested the chambermaid.

"I am her husband."

"Heavens! And the gentleman who brought her here, and who spoke of her as his wife——"

"Was an unspeakable villain. Is it true that he is dead?"

"True as the sky above us. He had not been in this house ten minutes; the saloon bell rang violently—we have no electric bells here; it is a loud bell that can be heard all over the house—we rushed to answer it, for it had the sound of danger. We found both doors locked—the door on the landing, and the door in the bedroom where he now lies. All the rooms on the noble floor have doors of communication. We heard strange sounds within —sounds of choking—deep groans; and we broke open the door. He was lying in the armchair. His head had fallen across the arm, his hands were grasping the wood-work convulsively, as in the last struggle; the blood was bubbling from his lips, but slower and slower. His eyes were wide open—glassy, horrible. Ah, signor, it will be long before we forget that sight. All has been done that was needful. I have taken care of that. I sent for the mayor last night. The signor had a letter-case in his pocket, stuffed with bank-notes, which has been put in a sealed envelope. Everything has been done in proper order. They will bury him this night, in our little cemetery, unless you have the body removed before the evening."

"Let him lie where his last crime brought him. He is lucky to have escaped a worse fate. And now take me to my wife."

"La signora is in the room at the other end of the noble floor," said the landlord, and led the way to a spacious chamber, which looked like a state bedroom in the castle of Otranto, a panelled room, of a sombre magnificence, and with a castellated ebony and alabaster bedstead of the

sixteenth century, huge as the bed of Ware, gloomy as a mausoleum.

And the figure that lay on it, lightly covered with a silken counterpane, looked so fragile, the white face so still and lifeless, that Arden's heart sank with a sudden despair. If this was not death, it was too like death; and he gazed at those marble features in an agony of fear. Would those eyelids ever again unveil the lovely eyes, those pallid lips ever smile again? Speechless, motionless, she lay there, like a broken lily.

They had found her lying on the grass by the fountain. She had fallen upon her right arm, which was broken, the woman who was nursing her told Arden. They feared there might be fracture of the skull, but the doctor from Damezzo had not yet come, though a messenger had been sent at day-break. He was absent, at a distant village, where he had gone to a bad case overnight.

Arden asked for another messenger, and sent him with a letter to the landlord of the Damezzo hotel, begging him to telephone to St. Moritz, for the English doctor, and an English nurse, if one could be found there. He went down to the hall, put his letter into the messenger's hand, with full instructions. He was to insist upon seeing the hotel keeper without an instant's delay, on a matter of life and death; he was to wait at Damezzo for the answer on the telephone; and he was to take a telegram to the post-office, a telegram which Arden had written, informing the Cornish squire of St. Just's sudden death, and the interment arranged for that evening in the cemetery at Locco. Another telegram was to be sent to the Chief at Scotland Yard, to convey the same information. Arden watched the young man pass under the archway, with rapid steps, a slim, long-legged youth, who would be likely to get over the ground quickly, having been promised a generous reward. The innkeeper said he would make the downhill journey, by cross cuts across the woods, as fast as a horse could do it; and there being no horse available, Arden had to be content with this assurance.

He went back to the room where Rachel was lying, and sat by the bed, motionless, silent, scarcely seeming to breathe, a statue of despair.

A fractured skull; reason perhaps fled for ever. Would

she live—if her life were spared—a mindless image; not the Rachel he had loved, but a beautiful ghost, the semblance of that sweet companion, that bright intelligence?

The messenger brought back the reply from St. Moritz. The doctor would start immediately, and bring a nurse with him. Arden calculated that he might arrive in three hours; three hours of waiting, perhaps of peril. The Damezzo doctor had not been heard of, and, had he appeared, Arden would have hesitated about allowing him to touch the patient. The nurse had applied cold lotions to the broken arm. She seemed a capable person; but she had not ventured to examine the patient's head, and it was only the stains of blood on the pillow that had suggested fracture.

The day wore on; the slow weary hours of suspense crawled by; till the time when the doctor might be expected. Every sound of wheels in the stony street now became an agitating fact. Happily, such sounds were not frequent in this torrid month, when the tourist season had not yet begun at Locco. At last there came the sound of quick, light wheels; and a carriage drew up below. He had come, the bringer of hope, or the bringer of woe. He had come, to pronounce sentence of doom, or give promise of healing. Arden rose, pale as death, and offered the doctor a shaking hand, and murmured a word of welcome to the nurse whom he brought with him, a young Englishwoman, in a neat grey uniform.

"You are good to come so quickly. My wife fell off the balcony last night. She has been lying senseless ever since. Her arm is broken; and this good woman thinks there may be injury to the skull. No one has dared to look. We waited for you."

He spoke with effort, in short sentences, breathlessly.

"When did the accident happen?"

"Between ten and eleven o'clock last night."

"Over eighteen hours! That's long!"

The doctor went to the bedside, and helped the nurse to raise the prostrate form, and then, with skilled touches, examined the head under the soft brown hair.

These are the moments that age a man—the moments that after-years of happiness cannot blot from the memory.

The doctor looked up, after a slow and careful examination.

"There is no injury to the bone. It is a bad case of concussion. And now we will look at the arm."

That was a more difficult business. Arm and collar-bone were broken, and there were broken ribs. Arden stood with his face to the open window, with his hands clenched, and his heart beating furiously, waiting for the verdict.

"Is it—is it likely to be fatal?" he asked, when the doctor came to him.

"It need not be fatal—if all go well; but she has been badly hurt. I can't conceal from you that it is a serious case. I don't think the arm will give much trouble. The broken ribs are the worst. There is always fear of lung trouble; and I don't like the long spell of unconsciousness. You have got a good nurse by a fluke. Nurse Mabel had just finished with a case at Pontresina. She would have been on her way back to England to-morrow."

"It was lucky. The person here seems capable. She can help Nurse Mabel, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, we'll make her useful."

"Shall you set the broken arm at once?"

"I think not. I shall wait for some recovery of consciousness. She is almost pulseless. I should be afraid to do anything in her present condition."

"Can you stop with her?"

"I'll stop to-night; but I must go back to St. Moritz early to-morrow morning."

"And after that?"

"I'll come back to-morrow night. And now you had better go and walk about a little. You can be no good here; and I don't want another patient. I shall have my hands full by-and-by with your wife."

He spoke with a friendly roughness, which was more cheering than the usual professional manner. Arden had made his acquaintance on the golf-links at Samaden, and had consulted him about some trivial matter, so they were on friendly terms; and now it was evident the doctor's sympathies were awakened by the piteous condition of his patient, whom he had admired in perfect health and beauty less than a month ago.

Arden did not mean to go farther than the garden. He had been shown the spot where Rachel had been found by

the hotel servants, who had been so distracted by the catastrophe of St. Just's sudden death that they remained for some time in ignorance of her fate. The grass still bore the impress of the form that had lain there, and he found stains of blood and a broken comb that had fallen from her hair. He fled from the horror of the spot, and went through the little street, with slow, dejected steps, and along the hill-side road, till he came to a tiny cemetery, a place of black wood crosses and neglected graves, where flower and weed grew at random, a lonely graveyard, girdled by a low stone wall.

A man was digging a grave near the gate. Arden stood and watched him with melancholy eyes. Another grave might have to be dug there, a grave which for him would mean the end of all things. Was she to be taken from him, this sweet woman whom he had loved with all his power of loving; albeit to-day he felt as if he had never loved her well enough, never given her the absolute unqualified adoration which her exquisite nature deserved? Never before had he known fear for her well-being. Sickness had never tried her; not even when her child was born, or when her child died. Neither joy nor sorrow had broken that perfect health with which Nature had gifted her.

He asked the grave-digger for whom he was working.

"For the foreigner who died at the inn last night: a rich nobleman. He is to be buried at eight o'clock. His friends will take the coffin up again in a week or two perhaps, and carry his excellence back to his own country. This is a poor place for a rich nobleman."

"Where the tree falls, there let it lie," said Arden. "If I were to die in this quiet place, I would rather rest here than be carted over half Europe."

"Ah, but the signor is not going to die, though he looks ill. But I may have another grave to dig to-morrow; for the foreign excellency's wife threw herself out of window in a passion of grief, when she saw her husband dying, and they tell me she can't live long."

Arden went back to the inn. He had asked for a room next that where his wife was lying. He found his servant there, unpacking and arranging things, while Rachel's maid had established herself in the sick-room. There was a door

between the two rooms; but the doctor forbade his seeing his wife again that evening. There had been some faint return of consciousness; but there were also indications of fever, and the patient must be kept perfectly quiet. Fever was now what they had to fear. He could have the satisfaction of knowing that he was near her, and could have frequent tidings of her condition; and his friendly doctor told him that the best thing he could do was to eat a light supper, and try to get a good night's rest.

"You think I can rest while her life hangs in the balance?"

"It'll be hard, perhaps, but you ought to do it, for her sake. We are going to pull her through; and when she begins to mend, it won't do for her to see the spectre of despair at her bedside. You will have to be cheerful, when she gets better."

"When she gets better! Tell me that the danger is past, and I will be as merry as a grig."

"Not if you've let yourself run down, and are looking like an anæmic ghost. Come, I want some food myself; and I shall insist on your eating a cutlet. They profess to be able to give us soup and cutlets at nine o'clock—after the gentleman at the end of the passage has been taken to his last home. Do you know anything about him, by-the-by?"

"I know a good deal about him; but I'd rather not talk of him to-night, if you'll excuse me. I may tell you more some day, perhaps."

"Are you going to the funeral?"

"No."

"I have established Mrs. Arden's maid as night nurse. The Locco woman will wait upon the sick-room, and help the nurses on occasion. I feel sure we shall do very well."

"And you will come every day?"

"Every night, while the case is urgent. It'll mean my living on the road. But God grant the worst trouble may soon be over, and we shall get into smooth water. I rely upon you for helping me by keeping very quiet."

"And I am not even to see her?"

"Not till I give you leave."

And now came the dark passage through the valley of

the Shadow of Death; that long agony of suspense, when the life of the creature we love trembles in the balance, and each new sun may rise upon a day of despair. In Arden's case the time was long; the alternations of hope and fear were frequent. The slow hours crawled by—unrest by day, and fear by night. There were many days and nights in which he was not allowed to see his wife, when her frail hold upon existence would be jeopardized by the slightest agitation, and when the doctor's best hope was to keep her in a state of semi-consciousness, all emotions, all knowledge of the life around her, held in suspense.

"It is hard lines for you," he said kindly; "but you will have your reward by-and-by, if we pull her through."

If! That was the terrible word which hung upon Arden's soul like a leaden weight. If! It was in his mind day after day, as he paced the little garden behind the hotel, miserably restless, yet not daring to go farther from the house, roaming up and down, and in and out, by the old yew hedges, the scarlet and orange salvias, tall and bright, like flowers of fire and flame; the roses and carnations, jessamine, and myrtle, all the beauty of that summery land, which his weary eyes looked at unseeing.

There came one terrible sundown, when the fever was at its height, and when the life hung by a thread so fine that the doctor was constrained to speak words of warning.

"I don't like the look of things, Arden. I am afraid——"

"You are afraid that she will die?"

"It is very serious."

"Let me see her, then—don't keep me from her. Don't let her die without my seeing her. Man alive, if you knew how I love her!"

"You can come in and look at her. It will make no difference to her, poor soul. She will not know you. You can come into the room—softly, in your slippers—and keep in the shadow. Don't let her see you."

Arden crept, shoeless, into the shadowy room, where only one feeble light was burning on the dressing-table. Rachel was lying with wide-open eyes, looking straight before her, and talking rapidly, in a low troubled voice. Who could tell what strange visions were moving before

those fever-bright eyes? They were blind to earthly things, and she did not see her husband, as he stood a little way from the bed, gazing at her.

He stood so for some time, motionless, till the doctor touched him on the shoulder, and gently drew him from the room.

"You see, my dear fellow, you can do no good here. You must be patient. We are in God's hand."

Arden remembered a line of Browning's—"We are in God's hand to-night."

Browning believed in God. The strong, staunch, manly confidence in something higher and nobler than humanity rings out clear and loud in that noble verse. It rings as true at the beginning as at the end of the poet's earthly pilgrimage. It was his message to mankind, and it knew no wavering when he passed through the valley of the shadow, and the wife he idolized was taken from him.

Arden went out of the house into the moonlit garden. It was the first week in October, and the hotel was empty again, as it had been in July. The horror of seeing strange faces, and hearing careless, happy voices, was no longer to be suffered. There had been only a few people, for he had retained the whole of the principal floor, including that locked bedchamber where the dead man had lain, and which he had never entered. All visitors were gone now, and the mountain air blew keen over the long grass in the quaint old garden. He went from the garden to the street. The great church rose up before him, tower and cupola silver white against the dark blue sky. The door was open. He had but to lift the curtain and go in. All was dark and cold, save for the sacred lamp hanging before the altar, and a feeble taper burning here and there in a side chapel.

He had sat in churches to please his wife, had knelt and listened to the prayers, not in a mocking spirit, not as a hypocrite, but pitying himself for his unbelief, for his having missed that which gave gladness and consolation to other people. But to-night he crept into the vast empty church, into the gloom and silence, crushed and broken, feeling his utter helplessness in the hand of Omnipotence. To-night he wanted God; and if belief could grow in an hour, and if

a man who had rejected Christ from his youth upward could change in an instant, and supplicate and adore, and stretch out his hands across the darkness, to touch the hem of the miracle-working garment, and win healing for the creature he loved—if that were possible, there was no depth of self-humiliation, no surrender of intellectual pride, from which he would recoil. He would have made himself a monk of the most fanatical order in Christendom, would have devoted all his future life to automatic prayers and superstitious penances, only to keep his beloved back from the grave; only to know, even while parted from her by the tyranny of his order, that she lived; and that in some distant day their hands might meet across the convent bars, and he might see and hear her, were it but for a few moments.

So far as he could see in the dim light, the church was empty. He knelt in front of the high altar, under the dark-red lamp. He bowed his head on the broad marble railing, grovelling before the Power that he could only half acknowledge.

He pressed his burning forehead on the cold marble, worn by many a weary brow, by the forehead of sinner and saint, in the centuries that were gone, since the piety of the rich built a cathedral for this small flock, dwelling among the hills, remote from the traffic of life. The silence and the dim light seemed to him like the quiet gloom of the grave. How glad he would be to be dead; if she were doomed to die. Kneeling there in his despair, he debated within himself the manner of his death; for he did not mean to go on living after she was gone.

There was the river, the swift, deep river in the valley below, by which they had walked in the clear morning light, and in the golden hour before sunset. A river of rest, he thought, picturing the bright blue stream, the grey-green sward purpled with crocuses. Where could he find an easier close to a hateful life? But he wanted her to live, and bless him with her love. He wanted life with her, life that is so sweet where love is; so bitter and barren where love is not.

Involuntarily there came from the agonized heart man's despairing cry to God.

"What am I, O Thou unknown Omnipotence, that I

should question Thy power to punish, to annihilate, or to save? I am a worm, and no man. I tremble while I doubt. I have known the powers of hell; oh, give me to learn the dominion of heaven. Give me back my wife, my peace of mind; lift this shroud of horror from my soul.

"I am humbled to the dust. I cannot pray, but I can suffer and submit. Oh, let my sufferings count as prayers; accept the sacrifice of my troubled mind. O unknown Power, inscrutable, unthinkable, Thou who hast neither habitation nor name, but who livest in the instinct of mankind. Thou whom the believer adores, and whom the sceptic longs for, without whose promise of immortality our life is but a mockery of man's capacity to live; enter into my barren mind, O unknown Power, and bend my spirit to Thy will. Let me be as the lowest of Thy worshippers, as the savage who has heard of Thee with fear and trembling, who offers himself to Thee in unquestioning faith. I have been made to tremble before unseen malignity; oh, let me feel the might of unseen Beneficence."

XXX.

From Walter Arden to Douglas Campbell.

Grove Park, near Bargrove, Herts,
Midsummer Day, 190–.

My dear Douglas,

This delicious summer day is my wife's birthday, and I think I could not choose a better date on which to write to my dear old friend, after an interval of more than half a year. You will receive this letter, with its odour of fresh-gathered roses, by your winter hearth, piled with the spoil of your neighbouring forest; and, had I the pen of an impressionist, I might make you envious with a vivid picture of the garden I look out upon through the wide Tudor window, an old-world garden of level paths, box borders, clipped yews, and long arcades, curtained with climbing roses. No doubt, were I to take so much pains, you would reply that everything floral thrives in Tasmania as it can never thrive in England; and that my roses would make a sorry show beside your pelargoniums, your myrtles, and orange trees, flourishing in the open air. I hope you will tire of your perfect climate, and your superior floriculture, some day, and give Rachel and me the happiness of welcoming you to this dear old English manor house, which we love quite as well as if the sons of the soil who dwelt here from generation to generation—till the end of last century—had been our ancestors.

In your last letter you reproached me for not having given you fuller details of my life during the last three happy years; since the passing of that inexplicable trouble upon which I was able to expatiate to you, with the assurance of your compassion and your patience. I wrote to you then as to the one friend in whom I dared to confide; for I knew

that no experience of the Unseen was without interest for you.

But since I have come out of that dark cloud—out of that mystery which I am content to leave for ever unexplained—the course of my life has been smooth and uneventful, and offers little to record; except the fulfilment of almost every wish, and a happiness far beyond my deserts, and even beyond my fondest hopes. I have restrained myself in writing of these things, lest I should lapse into twaddle; but since you ask for details, you shall have the history of the Arden settlement, in the leafy glades and upland commons of the prettiest part of Hertfordshire.

I have just one hour of leisure in which to write, before I start with Rachel, for a picnic in the adjacent wood, which is to honour the anniversary; a quiet luncheon for Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer, my wife, and me; to be followed by a picnic tea, at which all our workpeople and their families are to assemble, for which reason our two factories are to stop work two hours earlier than usual. How I wish you could be among us, Douglas, to see all those cheerful faces, all that happiness so cheaply purchased. Happiness that lasts for a day, you might answer; but believe me, when you give your guinea for a day's pleasure for old or young, of the class whose pleasures are so rare, you buy something more than the day's outing, the plenteous meal, and the boisterous games. You buy happy memories that linger through the monotonous months, and lighten toil, memories that are fresh perhaps when the circling year brings its new festival, and the van-wheels are rolling once again on the white summer road, and the children singing—most discordantly, alas!—in their joy.

Our two modest factories—the toy-making and the jam-making—have thriven wonderfully; and the profit-sharing system, which some economists condemn, has been thoroughly successful in our small communities. Our men and women, and even the children, take a pride in the organization with whose prosperity they prosper; and they all talk of "our factory" with a proud sense of ownership.

Sitting in this grave old oak-panelled room, with the sunlit flower-garden in front of my window, and my heart full of the tranquil happiness of a life that realizes all my

ideals, I look back, across the last happy years, to the year of Mary Selby's tragic death, and the long agony of my wife's terrible illness, the illness which lasted, from that hideous night in July, till the birth of our boy in the following February; and I wonder that after such darkness should come such light. It was not till her son was born that the mother's peril was past. He came to us as the child of promise, bringing healing and peace. Her mind came out of the cloud which had darkened it through those dismal months; her physical health was gradually restored; and before the end of the year she was yearning for the renewal of her work in the slums of East-end London.

It was then that I framed the scheme that has succeeded beyond my hopes. I told my wife that, with my consent, she should never revisit those dark places, never hazard her life, and the life of her child, among those fever-haunted dens, those loathsome tenement houses which cry aloud to heaven against the wretches who own them, and batten on the needs of abject poverty. She should still work for the poor, still move among her fellow-creatures as a ministering angel; but her poor should live in pure air, and their paths should be paths of pleasantness. The mountain should be brought to Mahomet.

And then I unfolded my plans, and told her how I was negotiating for an estate of nearly a thousand acres in the prettiest part of Hertfordshire, less than three miles from a market town and railway station, with an old Tudor manor house, and gardens and park, embosomed in lovely woods. On an outlying field I proposed to build two small factories—one for jam-making, from fruit grown on our own land; the other for toy-making, which was an idea of my own, as I wanted to see whether small English fingers were not as capable as small German fingers. For this purpose I meant to bring over half a dozen toy-makers, men and women, from Nuremburg, to teach our children their art.

My plans were approved by my dear wife; and I lost no time in realizing them. Both our factories have been in full swing for two years, and are doing good business. Our men and women work in the fruit-gardens and in the jam-making; while almost all the work in the toy-factory is done

by children from twelve years old, half-timers, whose mornings are spent in our schools. We have built a model village for our workpeople, and we have given them a communal dairy and poultry farm of two hundred acres, where all work in turn, for the benefit of all. We have a cricket and football ground, and a shooting-range equal to the best in the county. We have a club and library, and my generous father-in-law has built us a church, severely Gothic, of small size, but capable of extension should the need arise in days to come. Our curate-in-charge, who came to us from the East End, is a man of broad views, and warm sympathy.

You may imagine my wife's delight in superintending the building of our cottages, healthful homes for the families we have brought from that foul ant-heap in East London, to these wide commons and woods. We were careful in our choice of people for our new settlement, knowing that there were many among our old friends in whom the love of cities was stronger than the desire for health and cleanliness; and these we had to leave in their miserable environment. There were more by hundreds than we could accommodate who yearned for fresh air and decent homes, and who came eagerly, with their rejoicing children, as to a land of milk and honey; and I think I may say without boasting that our village has been to these a veritable Canaan. If you could see how the pinched gutter-snipe face of our nine and ten year old boys has filled out and reddened in the sun, how the wan cheeks of the mothers have grown plump and rosy, and how self-respect and the love of fresh air and clean water have increased with every month of rural life, you would think as I do, that the solution of that great problem—the housing of the London poor—could best be found in the transplantation of the factories round which the poor have to live. The country is wide enough for all, and the ugliness of a chimney here and there need not spoil the face of it; while to bring the people back to the wide village street, the woods and fields, the green lanes, white with flowering hawthorns, and commons, golden with gorse and broom, is to bring them from misery to comfort.

I could write at much greater length of all that Rachel

has done for the welfare of our people, and of the love they bear her; but I hope the day is not far distant when you will see with your eyes and hear with your ears what can be done by those who love their fellow-creatures, and who have means which enable them to realize their dreams of benevolence.

I must add that Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer are large helpers in all our schemes; and they are both completely satisfied with their daughter's life and surroundings. We have the house in Guelph Place still. So much of that first home was a gift from Rachel's father that it would have been churlish for us to abandon it; and as our country home is little more than an hour's journey from the West End, we are able to see a good deal of the dear people in Carlton House Terrace; without deserting those other people who look to us for so much, for evening lectures, and concerts, for out-of-door sketching-classes, for mothers' meetings, for Saturday payments to their clubs and societies; for all that makes for thrift, improvement, and recreation; and for all that strengthens the bond between rich and poor.

I must add that our toy-making has been particularly successful, and that some of our guttersnipes have developed a remarkable inventiveness and adroitness in their work; and furthermore that a wholesale house near Liverpool Street has within the last half-year bought our goods as largely as the German toys in which they dealt exclusively, before we came into the field.

So much for temporal things, and the interests which involve the happiness of so many outside the narrow circle of our home. What shall I say of spiritual things, to you from whom I have withheld none of the dark secrets of my mind in the mysterious sufferings of past years? What shall I say of myself, now that my cup of content is full; now that I have nothing left to desire, except that to-morrow may be as to-day, and that the dear wife in whom I find the supreme good, and for whom I live, may bear me company to the end of my journey; lovely in age as in youth, with the spiritual light that shines through corporal beauty, and makes it divine? What shall I say? I dare not call myself a believer, for the consummate mind that governs the universe, and the after-life of man, are still

inexplicable, unimaginable problems, for which I can find no answer in the Book that Rachel accepts as the clue to all mysteries. But I am no longer a materialist. I have been brought to acknowledge the something more than the machine of bone and flesh, evolved through countless ages from lowliest beginnings, perfected protoplasm. I have felt and suffered the influence of an unseen Enemy; and in that crisis of my life when I stood in danger of losing all that made life dear, my heart seemed lightened by the influence of an unseen Friend. And from that hour of peril until now I have seemed to live in the warm radiance of that Influence, an unknown Beneficence, mysterious, indefinable. In that vague Presence, in the perfect beauty of my wife's nature, and in the many fine impulses and generous feelings which I discover among the humble and meek ones of this earth, I find the surest pledge of the life immortal; for these things are not of flesh, but of spirit, and I tell myself that spirit cannot die.

THE END.

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